OUTLINES OF SERMONS

ON THE

MIRACLES AND PARABLES

OF THE

OLD TESTAMENT,

ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

BY

A LONDON MINISTER.

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PREFACE.

THE author of the original outlines contained in this volume offers them to students of the Holy Scripture in the belief that they deal with subjects that have not before, as a whole, been treated homiletically. According to the best authorities, no book has ever been published on the Miracles and Parables of the Old Testament answering to the large number of works on those of the New Testament. This being the case, there is no need of apology for this volume on the ground that it has been preceded by others of a similar character. It will be seen at once that the thoughts are merely *suggested.* They are not expanded *into* sermons, but it is hoped they may be used as *seeds* of sermons. The selections from other sources have been made after a careful examination of nearly all that has been written upon each subject, and it is believed that they will greatly

enhance the value of the book. In looking at any beautiful object, we find our pleasure greatly increased if we regard it from different points of view, and also if we note the variety of impressions which the same object produces upon different spectators. And so it is hoped that the study of these Old Testament Miracles and Parables will be found more interesting when they are regarded from the standpoints of men living in different ages of the Church, and belonging to different schools of Christian thought. In making the selections, the aim has been to "comprehend with all saints" the "mind of the Spirit" in these portions of Divine Revelation. With regard to what constitutes a Miracle or a Parable, there must of necessity be a diversity of opinion. According to Archbishop Trench, "an extraordinary Divine causalty, and not that ordinary which we acknowledge everywhere, and in everything, belongs to the essence of a miracle. Yet," he adds, "it is not to be denied that the natural itself may become miraculous *to us* by the way in which it is timed—by the ends which it is made to serve." The latest writer on the Parables—Canon Barry—speaking especially with reference to those of the Old Testament, says: "The original word *(mashâl)* in the Hebrew, like the word 'parable' in the Greek, conveys as its fundamental idea the notion of *comparison*, or rather the setting of one thing beside another, generally for comparison, occasionally for con-

trast. . . . . Accordingly, it is not surprising that, if we take the principle of comparison in its widest sense, it may be almost said to pervade the whole of Scripture, and embody itself in a thousand shapes." But he considers the Parables "strictly so called" to consist of "explicit narratives, intended to illustrate some law or principle, the allegory, and the symbolical visions or actions of the prophetical writings." It is believed that every event here regarded as a Miracle, and every Parable treated, will come within the limits of one or other of these definitions.

London, May, 1878.

EXPOSITORY OUTLINES

ON THE

MIRACLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

LOT'S WIFE BECOMING A PILLAR OF SALT.

"*But his wife looked back from behind him and she became a pillar of salt.*"—Gen. xix. 26.

I.—The miraculous element of this transformation is found, not in the fact of the change, but in the manner and circumstances.

It was not a miracle that Lot's wife should die, and it would not have been miraculous, if her body had been left in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, that it should, in time, have become incrusted with salt; but her death occurring at the moment of her looking back, and the change in her body taking place at the same time, constituted the occurrence a miracle.

II.—The miracle of judgment was merited.

The greatness of a sin depends upon the knowledge possessed by the sinner, and the motives he has for abstaining from it. Lot's wife possessed abundant opportunities of knowing the will of God. She was related to the "friend of God" (Jas. ii. 23). She had been privileged to entertain angels (Gen. xix. 3). She knew the wickedness of the city she had left and the punishment which was to come upon it. Hence the aggravation of her sin. As a rule God's

miracles are unmerited, of grace, through faith; this was the opposite.

LESSONS.

I.—The ruling desires of the mind will be expressed in the transformation of the body. Those whose desires are of the earth, earthy, will become more and more under the power of the material, while those whose longings are towards the spiritual, will, in time, be entirely freed from bodily thraldom (1 Cor. xv. 44).

II.—The holiest influence and the most godly relationship cannot save men unless they are willing to be saved. The angels could "lay hold" of this woman's body (verse 16), but they could not change her disposition.

III.—The safety of a godly life depends upon continuance in it. Lot's wife left Sodom, but perished in its neighbourhood.

IV.—Connection with the godly may bring ungodly people the ministration of angels.

SELECTED—I.

I.—Inquire in what particulars the guilt of Lot's wife consisted.

Her sin was that of disobedience, and it consisted of several degrees. First: she gave such credit to the angel as she listed, and her want of faith in the angel's warning made her to begin to doubt whether her husband had not been falsely alarmed, and, therefore, she must needs look back to see. Disobedience is usually attended with want of faith. Fainting is the next step to wavering. Her disobedience seems partly to have arisen from an excessive attachment to the conveniences and enjoyments of this life. She did not want salvation, but upon her own terms, like the fearful Israelites, who would have exchanged the miracles of God for the flesh-pots of Egypt. Further, her crime was attended with a double aggravation; she fell, although she had stood long; she fell,

even when the hand of God was stretched forth to uphold her. She had continued in obedience thirty years, had worshipped the true God amidst the superstitions of Egypt, &c., had passed the tempestuous sea, and now made shipwreck in the very entrance of the harbour. She fell, having angels to go before her, her husband to bear her company; and being now at the gates of Zoar.

II.—Consider her punishment.

Her death was *instantaneous*. We naturally desire to die with some previous breathing time, bequeathing a blessing to our children, love to our friends, and reconciliation to our enemies. Sudden death is dreaded. But such was Lot's wife. She looked back and never again looked forward. We desire to have a remorse for sin, ere we be taken from life: death in the very act is most awful. But such was the death of this woman. She died, while her head was still turned back. We desire to die the common death of all mankind; an unusual death is more full of terror. God's hand alighted on Lot's wife in a marked and tremendous manner. We naturally desire, when dead, to sleep by those who were dearest to us when living. God forbid that we should remain above ground as an object for the finger of scorn. But Lot's wife so continued a monument of God's wrath.

III.—The practical lessons suggested.

1. Sin is not to be estimated by the external action, but by the inward motive. Lot's wife was condemned for a *look*, but that look expressed preference of her own will to the will of God; contempt of God's anger and justice, indifference to the rewards of obedience, ingratitude for the grace displayed in her deliverance. 2. As the wolf of hell spared not the flock of Christ; as, of Noah's eight and Lot's four, one fell away, let us not indulge a spirit of proud security. Lot's wife was exposed to destruction even in the company of angels. 3. God expects a constant and unvarying obedience. Lot's wife had continued long in obedience, but the treason of one hour undid the

loyalty of many years. They perished who remained in Sodom, and one perished who went out. A true Christian, while he blushes at what he has been, will tremble at what he may be.—*Bishop Andrews.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—God will certainly bring destruction upon the wicked.

That the righteous should be treated as the wicked, or the wicked as the righteous, would be inconsistent with the rectitude of the "Judge of all the earth."

II.—God hath provided a place or method of safety.

III.—God gives many calls and motives to hasten and escape for our lives.

IV.—Men are apt to linger and look back after they have begun to escape.—*Job Orton.*

THE BURNING BUSH.

"*And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him (Moses) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed,*" *etc.*—Exod. iii. 2-6.

I.—This manifestation was miraculous.

The fire was not kindled by any natural cause; if it had been, it would soon have consumed that upon which it fed. Bush-wood, dry as this thorn-bush most likely was, would soon have been reduced to ashes, and the fire would soon have gone out from lack of fuel. But the steady blaze continued. Moreover,

a voice, speaking in human language, issued from its midst—a miracle within a miracle.

II.—The miraculous manifestation was timely.

1. In relation to the *people for whom* it was made. The 400 years of affliction foretold to Abraham (Gen. xv. 13) had passed away; many kings of Egypt had ruled since the one who knew Joseph; the nation which would have been well content to settle for ever in the land of Goshen, and would have fallen into the idolatrous worship of the Egyptians if their temporal prosperity had continued (Num. xi. 5; Josh. xxiv. 14), were, in consequence of their present misery, prepared to welcome any change which promised relief. The hour before the dawn is the darkest, and makes the first rays of light doubly precious. 2. In relation to the *man to whom* it was made. The life of Moses was remarkably divided into three forties. The completion of the first forty years of his life brought him to Midian; at the end of the second he was brought back to Egypt; and, at the expiration of the third, he was translated to heaven. At the end of the first period he was evidently too rash for the great work of his life; at the end of the last he would have been longing for rest; at the time when God appeared to him in the desert he was in the prime of his life, and all his spiritual attainments were matured by forty years communion with God in the wilderness.

III.—The miraculous manifestation was symbolic.

1. An ordinary thorn-bush with God in its midst typified the higher use to which God was about to put a nation composed of people who were at that time very ordinary and commonplace. As the bush became the medium of the revelation of God, so Israel was to become the means of revealing Him to mankind. "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests" (Exod. xix. 6). 2. Although fire is often used as a symbol of the Divine Nature, it is not *destructive* fire, but *glorifying*. True, He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29) to all that is

unholy, but He manifests Himself for the *re-construction*, not for the *destruction*, of men. The Divine presence in the bush not only did not consume it, but beautified it. So His presence in the Hebrew nation (Isa. lx. 30). 3. No power can destroy that in which God dwells. No power in the universe could destroy the bush while His presence was in it, and no power could overcome the Jewish nation while God was in its midst. Her prophets could exultingly sing, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (Ps. xlvi. 5); and even now she might adopt as her motto, "Burned with fire and not consumed."

IV.—The miraculous manifestation attained the end for which it was intended.

1. It arrested attention and led to inquiry. 2. Inquiry led to an increased knowledge of God: "I am the God of thy Father," &c. 3. Increased knowledge led to deeper reverence: "Moses hid his face." This is the end designed by every revelation from God.

LESSONS.

I.—The invisible God reveals Himself within the range of our capabilities of reception. The thorn-bush was a familiar object to Moses, and the revelation through it, though awe-inspiring, was not so overwhelming as to deprive him of the power of receiving it. So the manifestation of God in the babe of Bethlehem, the carpenter of Nazareth, the human son of man dying upon the cross. Has this glory led us to turn aside?

II.—This appearance and revelation of God illustrates God's punctuality in the performance of His promises. His law in nature is so dependable in its working, that we can know to a second when the next full moon will appear, and the law of His promise is just as certain to be "up to time."

God never is before His time
And never is behind.

SELECTED—I.

This wondrous appearance was (if I may so speak) the first personal interference of God for the deliverance of His ancient

people. If then, the captivity of Israel represent the spiritual bondage of man, the miracle of the burning bush commends itself to the regard of all whose cry for freedom has gone forth to God, and who hope to be led, by His Almighty power, from the house of bondage to the land of everlasting promise. Contemplate the miracle, then:

I.—As a typical appearance.

Examine the history of the Redeemer's Church in every period of its existence. The principalities and powers of evil have been arrayed against it. The bush has burned with a flame that has threatened its entire destruction; but it has remained to this day unconsumed, because the Almighty Angel of the gospel covenant was its preservation. The fire that was calculated to destroy, served only to enlighten and glorify. The protection afforded by the Redeemer to his body the church, has been, and is at this hour, bestowed upon every individual member of it. The bush may burn, and the flame appear irresistibly consuming: but when cast down and almost desponding, the Christian looks more nearly into the circumstances of his affliction, and endeavouring to trace in them the presence and promise of his Saviour, he finds the bush, although in itself a dry material, over which the fire would soon prevail, able to endure the severity of the probation. "When thou walkest through the fire thou shall not be burned," &c. And as the bush while it burned with the presence of the Lord assumed a grandeur of appearance until then unseen, so will the Christian character, refined by suffering. "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings—for the spirit of glory and of God restoreth upon you."

II.—The miracle now demands to be considered: As a vehicle of practical instruction.

Let the example of Moses teach us: 1. The duty of endeavouring to understand and improve every manifestation of

God, whether made in the walk of providence, or in the Scriptures of our salvation. A Christian can intentionally allow nothing to escape his notice. Least of all any manifestation different from the ordinary train of circumstances in which his life is passed. 2. To sincere inquirers it exhibits the blessings by which a diligent improvement of the means of spiritual grace will be recompensed. 3. In the midst of this gracious encouragement, the holy awe with which every approach to the majesty and counsels of God should be attended, —the very mercy of the gospel dispensation,—the contrast between it and the Mosaic revelation, should excite the Christian's humility because in it the glory of God and the sinfulness of sin are beheld with a clearness which no other medium can furnish.—*Buddicom.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—Endeavour to discover some of the grand views which may be here emblematically represented.

1. The flaming fire would suggest the presence of the Deity (see Exod. xix. 16-18; Isa. vi. 6; Ezek. i. 4). 2. The bush burning, but not consumed, might denote the awfulness of His offended justice (Deut. iv. 21; Mal. iii. 2). 3. Faith might therein discover the incarnation and sufferings of Christ; (1.) The bush may represent His human nature (Isa. liii. 2; (2.) The flame may shadow forth His Divine Nature (Deut. iv. 24).

II.—Show how this may justly be accounted a great sight.

1. It was the great I AM who exhibited this sight (Exod. iii. 14). 2. It was designed to afford a gleam of hope to Israel that their bondage was nearly over. Besides, Moses was skilled in the hieroglyphic literature of the Egyptians, and they figured out many things by fire and flame.

III.—In order to see this great sight, we must, like Moses, turn aside—

1. From the world (1 John iii. 15; 2 Cor. vi. 17). 2. Carnal reasoning (1 Cor. ii. 14; John iii. 9). 3. All known sin (Eph. iv. 17; 2 Peter i. 9).—"Pulpit Assistant."

THE CHANGING OF THE ROD OF AARON INTO A SERPENT.

"*And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron saying, when Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Show a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent,*" *etc.*—Exod. vii. 8-12.

I.—Those who claim a Divine commission will be expected to produce Divine credentials.

When the ambassador of a human king is sent with a message to another sovereign, he is expected to carry with him the evidence of his appointment, and to produce it when it is demanded. There was nothing unreasonable in Pharaoh's demand that Moses and Aaron, when they appeared before him as ambassadors from the Divine King, should give him some proof of their commission. The miracle of the text was their letter of credit.

II.—When real credentials are given, their effect may be weakened by imitations (verse 11).

The circulation of forged notes may weaken our confidence in genuine ones. A barrister who puts a forged letter into his evidence, arouses the suspicion of the judge concerning all the true documents. The enemies of truth have often adopted the tactics of the Egyptian sorcerers, who tried to lessen the influence of Aaron's miracle by false ones of their own working.

III.—But when the imitation is unable to stand before the reality, men are bound to admit the reality and to follow its teaching (verse 12).

A judge, who, after hearing evidence on both sides, which he considers equal, should refuse to admit a large increase of light in favour of one of his petitioners, would be looked upon as blinded by prejudice, and his decision as altogether unworthy

of regard. Pharaoh, governed by his feelings, and not by his reason or conscience, preferred to abide by the decision which he made before the literal "swallowing up" of the false evidence. His guilt begins at this point. Human society holds him unworthy to receive evidence who wilfully rejects it when it is contrary to his desires. "From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matt. xxv. 29).

Lessons.

I.—The servants of God must be able to produce evidence that they are what they profess to be. Moses and Aaron were enabled to prove their authority by the power of transforming a dead stick into a living serpent. Christians must prove their right to their name by showing a power to become transformed in character (Rom. xii. 2; 2 Cor. iii. 18).

II.—Although all kinds of divine working will find themselves face to face with imitations, yet it is always possible to distinguish the real from the false. We see flowers so well imitated, that at a distance, the real cannot be known from the artificial, but close contact will reveal the difference. Man may imitate the form and colour of the violet, but God alone can give it *fragrance*. The works of God in nature and in grace will bear close inspection.

SELECTED.

I.—God suffers the lying spirit to do strange things that the faith of some may be tried and manifested (Deut. xiii. 3; 1 Cor. xi. 9-19), and that the infidelity of others may be confirmed (2 Cor. iv. 4).

II.—The very appearance of opposition to truth, and the least head made against it, serve to justify the infidelity of those who are prejudiced against the light of it.

III.—The cause of God will undoubtedly triumph at last over all competition, and will reign alone (Dan. ii. 44).

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

I.

THE TURNING OF THE WATERS INTO BLOOD—Ex. vii. 19-25.

Miracles may be divided into two classes. There are those which are new creations, or are entirely beyond and outside natural laws, such as the manna, water from the rock, &c.; and there are those which consist in an extraordinary intensification or increase of natural phenomena or productions, as when our Lord fed the multitude with a few loaves and fishes, or the quails were rained down in thousands upon Israel. Most of the plagues of Egypt belong to the latter class, and in it we may probably place the turning of the water of the Nile into blood. "According to many travellers, the Nile water, when lowest, changes its colour, becomes greenish, and almost undrinkable; whereas, when rising, it becomes red, of an ochre hue, and then becomes more wholesome" *(Keil)*. "The miracle lies in the prediction of its sudden occurence, and in its magnitude, so that the red Nile water instead of becoming more wholesome assumed deadly properties" *(Lange)*. "The weighty points are really why it happened at a time of the year when the Nile is most clear, why it killed the fish and rendered the water unfit to drink" *(Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible")*. This occurrence is not without its analogy. The chemist can, by the increase of certain ingredients in a mixture, change a harmless or healing draught into a deadly poison. So God, by His Almighty chemistry, turned the source of life and health into the minister of death.

Notice—

I.—That this miracle was specially adapted to beget conviction of the power of Jehovah among the Egyptians.

1. It affected the every-day necessities of the whole nation. The Jewish multitude seem to have been more powerfully

moved in favour of our Lord's claims after His miracle of the loaves, than when He healed their sick, or even raised their dead (compare Matt. ix. 18-26 with John vi. 14-15). This was probably because it appealed to each man's individual bodily wants. So did the first plague of Egypt. It not only deprived them of drink, but also of their chief food (verse 21). 2. Their god was struck dead. The Nile was one of the principal divinities of Egypt. They worshipped it as a source of their national prosperity, as indeed it is, for without it Egypt could hardly exist as a habitable country. Now not only death had passed upon it, but corruption had set in (verse 21).

II.—That Satan can imitate God in His destructive, but not in his constructive, measures (verse 22).

The need of Egypt was pure water; all that her magicians could do was to make more blood. They could imitate a miracle of judgment, but not of healing. If a man were suffering from a disease which was brought on him by his own misconduct, a physician who intensified the malady would be considered not only unskilful, but cruel. This is what the devil can and does do. This is *all* that he can do.

LESSON.

Retribution is a part of the Divine Government of the world. In all probability the bodies of dead Hebrew children had floated upon the waters of the now loathsome river (chap. i. 22). The men whose outstretched hand it had obeyed, were in their infancy devoted to the god which had now been turned into an instrument of retributive justice. It was a long time since one of them had lain upon its banks, a helpless, feeble infant, but God's purposes had been ripening for fulfilment. The Lollards of England were once few and feeble; again and again their voices seemed to have died out; but their principles grew into manhood, and in the days of the Puritans men learned by experience the truth of that word of Christ, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. vii. 2).

SELECTED.

I.—Men are sure to be punished in that which they make a co-rival with God.

As the Nile was to Egypt instead of heaven, to moisten and fatten the earth, so their confidence was more in it than in heaven.

II.—Never any man delighted in blood, but he had enough of it ere his end.

They had shed but some few streams, and now behold whole rivers.

III.—One of the first miracles of Moses was the turning of water into blood, and that of our Lord Jesus was turning water into wine, thereby typifying the dispensation of death and terror, and that of mercy and life.

II.

THE FROGS—Exod. viii. 5-15.

I.—Divine chastisement for sin against nature and revelation.

Man possesses a natural reason which is said to be a law. When he makes a creature below himself an object of worship, he evidently transgresses this law, and is, according to Paul, "without excuse" (Rom. i. 19-23; ii. 14). This sin was carried to a great extent among the Egyptians. The frog was worshipped as a representative of their god *Osiris*, and *Ptha*, another of their deities, was represented with a frog's head. Now, these creatures were multiplied to so great an extent as to make them a means of chastisement. When the light of revelation is added to that of nature, men deserve a heavier punishment, because their guilt becomes greater in proportion to their clearer knowledge of the Divine will (Rom. ii. 12). Pharaoh and his people had received some revelation from God in the former miracles. Before the first sign was given him (chap. vi. 10) it was assumed that he had no light beyond his reason; there was therefore no element of judgment in it. Resistance to that evidence of the power of Jehovah brought

the first plague, which probably did not inflict much personal inconvenience upon the king, for water was obtained by digging (chap. vii. 24). But that miracle having no effect, the plague of frogs brought the evidence of Jehovah's displeasure into his very bed-chamber. There was no escape from this annoyance. Increase of light resisted brought a more severe punishment.

II.—Men who sin against nature and revelation desire the practice of sin without its consequences.

The thief who lives in a well ordered nation would like to enjoy his plunder without suffering the consequences. Pharaoh wanted to have the frogs removed, and retain Israel in bondage.

"May one be pardoned and retain the offence?" has been a question which sinners would always have gladly answered in the affirmative. God says *No* to it.

III.—Those who sin against the light of nature and revelation can only rid themselves of the burden of the consequences by appealing to the God of nature and revelation.

He who has fixed the wages of sin has ordained the method of remission. Pharaoh said, "Intreat the Lord." God had sent forth His decree, and at once His creatures passed the bounds of their habitation. Their sudden death throughout all the land, in answer to the prayer of Moses, revealed that God alone can make a separation between sin and its consequences.

IV.—The prayers of God's servants lessen the misery of the human race.

"The Lord did according to the word of Moses" (verse 13). The lives of the godly save the world from moral ruin (Matt. v. 13), and, when God visits it in judgment, their prayers shorten the length of the visitation (Isa. lxv. 8).

SELECTED.

I.—Whatsoever any man makes his god, beside the true one, shall be once his tormentor.

Those loathsome creatures leave their own element to punish them who detained Israel from their own.

II.—The feats of Satan may harden, but cannot benefit. God doth commonly use them in execution of judgment, never in works of mercy.

III.—God plagued by such contemptible instruments.

1. To magnify His own power He can serve His purposes by the most insignificant creatures as effectually as by the strongest. 2. To humble Pharaoh's pride and chastise his insolence. How great a mortification to a haughty monarch to be forced to submit to such despicable means.

III.

THE LICE (OR MOSQUITOS)—Exod. viii. 16-19.

Remark—

I.—God limits the power of Satan to imitate His works.

Of the first and second plagues we read "the magicians did so with their enchantments" (ch. vii. 22; viii. 7); but now, they "did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they *could not*." God says to the power of evil, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Our Lord "suffered not the devils to speak" (Mark i. 34), not even to bear testimony to His Messiahship (Luke iv. 41). Paul would not permit an evil spirit to testify that he was a servant of God (Acts xvi. 17, 18). Satan was permitted to go to a certain length with Job, but beyond that a chain held him back. The magicians had run the length of their chain in being permitted to imitate the first two judgments. In the year in which the infallibility of the present pope was proclaimed, he endeavoured to imitate the apostle who said "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts iii. 6). But the effort was a failure; no kind of semblance of a miracle was permitted. The pontiff failed as signally as the magicians of Egypt did.

II.—Those who encourage others to resist God may, bye-and-bye, desire to arrest their downward progress, and be unable to do so.

The confession of the magicians (verse 19) seems to imply a desire on their part to bring Pharaoh to yield, but "he hearkened not to them." A man may put a torch to a building, and, when he sees it in flames, may earnestly long to extinguish them, but it is then too late to undo his own work. So the pupil may go beyond his teacher in goodness or badness. "There are last which shall be first" (Luke xiii. 30).

III.—When a less judgment is acknowledged to be a Divine visitation, and yet fails to produce the intended effect, the ungodly may see in it an anticipation of a heavier retribution.

The first miraculous judgment was limited to the Nile, the manifestation of Divine displeasure was enclosed within the channel of the river. Because it was not followed by repentance, the second took a wider range and visited all the land, but no special suffering was inflicted. Bodily pain most likely was felt in the third, and the magicians rightly refer it to "the finger of God." The finger of Jehovah was prophetic of the "mighty hand and outstretched arm" (Deut. xxvi. 8), which finally smote the firstborn and overwhelmed Pharoah and his host in the Red Sea.

SELECTED.

I.—When the devil's agents are in the height of their pride, God shames them by a trifle.

Those that could make serpents and frogs, could neither make nor kill lice. That spirit which is powerful to execute the greatest things when he is bidden, is unable to do the least when he is restrained.

While wicked minds have their full scope, they never look above themselves; but when once God crosses their proceedings, they begin to give Him His own.

Now the co-rivals of Moses can say "This is the finger of God."—*Bishop Hall.*

IV.

THE FLIES (OR BLOODSUCKERS)—Exod. viii. 21-32.

I.—It sometimes depends upon the will of man whether God executes His judgments.

God here declares that the coming of the flies depends upon Pharaoh's refusal to let His people go. It is worth remark that the two verbs in God's message belong to the same root. It may be rendered "If thou *wilt not send* my people away, I *will send* the flies upon thee" *(Lange)*. The destruction of Nineveh, as foretold by Jonah, was averted by the will of the King and his people (Jonah iii. 6-10). The Saviour declares that the destruction of Jerusalem, and the overthrow of the Jewish nation was the result of the exercise of the human will. "I would . . . . ye would not (Luke xiii. 34). It depends upon the will of every man who has the revelation of God in Christ whether he accepts or rejects the invitation of mercy (Rev. xxii. 17). Pharaoh refused to exercise mercy, therefore he must have judgment.

II.—The movements of the smallest creature depend entirely upon the will of God.

On the refusal of Pharaoh the swarms of flying insects came upon him and his people in such numbers as to make them feel that they were messengers of God. Moreover, they visited only a part of the land (verse 22), and after the prayer of Moses, "there remained not one." When an army invades a land, occupies a rebellious province, and entirely passes by one that has submitted to the rule of the commander; when, at a given word, every soldier is entirely withdrawn from the whole land again, not one straggler remaining, it is obvious that the entire host is under the control of one will which secures a perfect unity of action among its individual members. So it was here. God's armies are composed of creatures of various degrees of intelligence and power, from those, one of whom,

> Spread his wings on the blast
> And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass'd,

to the millions of flies who stormed and captured the land of Egypt, and who could, if it had been the will of God, have left the Egyptians in the same condition as the destroying angel left the army of Sennacherib (Isa. xxxvii. 36).

SUGGESTIONS.

I.—The seen difference between the children of God and other men springs from a different, unseen relation. There was a covenant relationship between the nation who dwelt in Goshen and God which did not exist between Him and any other nation. Hence the present distinction in their circumstances. All men are said on the best authority to be the "offspring of God" (Acts xvii. 18), but the same authority distinguishes the "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" from the rest of mankind (Gal. iii. 26).

II.—God will be served in the way which He has ordained, and not in *any* way. Pharaoh said, "Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land." Moses said, "It is not meet so to do . . . we will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, *as he shall command us*" (verse 27).

III.—The blindness of men unenlightened by God's spirit renders God's way offensive to them. "The Egyptians will stone us," &c. (verse 26). The sacrifices of God's people (Heb. xiii. 15) have always been an offence to His enemies.

SELECTED.

It is here manifested—

I.—That swarms of flies, which seem to fly at random, are under the control of an intelligent mind.

II.—That the Lord knows them that are His, and will make it appear, perhaps in this world, certainly in the next.

III.—That God can extort a toleration of His worship, even from those that are really enemies to it.

Pharaoh, under the smart of the rod, will allow liberty of conscience to God's Israel, even in his own land.

V.

The Murrain upon the Cattle—Exod. ix. 1-7.

Consider—

I.—The peculiar adaptation of this miracle to the Egyptian people.

Wherever men of any degree of civilisation are found, they are generally sensitive on two points—their property and their religion. Anything that touches either of these will be felt more or less deeply. When both are attacked, a man feels that his heaven and earth are both threatened. The murrain amongst the Egyptians' cattle struck at their religion and property at the same time. Cattle, especially oxen, were held in high veneration by them, temples were erected, and worship was offered, to them. To send pestilence among them, was to aim another blow at Egyptian superstition. Then, of course, the death of these creatures would be a great financial loss, which would affect an ancient Egyptian as much as a modern Englishman. They had doubtless waxed rich upon the labour of the Hebrews, and, by this miracle, God reproves their idolatry and chastises them for their injustice.

Lessons.

I.—That a promise to do good, made without an intention of keeping it, will compel God, who cannot promise without performing, to fulfil His threatening of evil.

The safety of a cargo depends upon the strength of a vessel's ribs. If these break, all gives way. Promises are the ribs o society; where they are easily broken, there is no comfort or security for property or life. Hence *covenant breakers* especially incur Divine displeasure (Hosea x. 4; Rom. i. 31, &c.). Pharaoh was guilty of this sin repeatedly (ch. viii. 8, 28), in the matter of Israel, and his retribution increased in proportion to the repetition of his crime.

II.—Next to personal character, the *relationships* of life most vitally affect men's comfort and happiness. All Pharaoh's people suffered from their relationship to him as his subjects.

This principle extends to creatures below man. The cattle of Egypt suffered because their masters sinned. Especially is a man's welfare dependent upon his relation to his Almighty King and Father. A change here brings a revolution in life (see Phil. iii. 4, 11).

SELECTED.

I.—The hand of God is to be acknowledged even in the sickness and death of cattle.

"He preserveth man and beast" (Psa. xxxvi. 6).

II.—The creature is made subject to vanity by the sin of man, being liable, according to its capacity, to serve in his wickedness and to share his punishment, as in the deluge (Rom. viii. 20).

VI.

BOILS UPON MAN AND BEAST—Exod. ix. 8-12.

I.—Instruments of oppression shall become the means of punishment to the oppressor.

Ashes from the brick-kiln or furnace—associated with Israel's oppressive labour—were the symbolic means of bringing disease upon their oppressors. From the furnace had arisen the cry of the slave, which had "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (Jas. v. 4). The back of many a Hebrew was marked with scars of wounds made by the task-master's whip (ch. v. 14-16), and now the ashes of the kiln would bring similar suffering upon the Egyptians.

II.—Companions in sin shall be companions in the suffering entailed by it.

The disease was upon all the people; the magicians could not so much as appear before Pharaoh to advise or to encourage him. Sinners cannot help each other in the day of visitation. The devils, who were legion, could do nothing to help each other when Christ passed sentence on them. United in their evil work as they had been, they were united in a common downfall (Mark v. 9-13).

III.—When sinners harden their hearts against evidence, God will harden their hearts by evidence.

"Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart" (verse 12). This expression is now used for the first time. (The reading in chap. vii. 13 should be intransitive—*see Lange*). Revelation has a twofold effect upon men. There were Jews present at the resurrection of Lazarus who witnessed the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and who continued to live in Jerusalem during the growth of the Christian Church. If they resisted the evidence of the first, they would be less open to conviction from the second event; that which was intended for their conviction, would, by their rejection of the evidence, render them more insensible to the influence of the truth. Hence, it would harden their hearts (2 Cor. ii. 16). Food which nourishes the healthy body may increase disease in an unhealthy person. The evil is not in the food, but in the unnatural state of the organs which receive it. This process of hardening Pharaoh's heart has been likened to the effect produced upon the limbs of the fakirs of India. These devotees keep an arm or a leg stretched out in one position for years. This transgression of God's law makes the limb so rigid, that, by reason of the action of the natural law, it cannot be restored to its right position.

SELECTED.

I.—If lesser judgments do not do their work, God will send greater.

When the Egyptians were not wrought upon by the death of their cattle, God sent disease upon their bodies.

II.—God will severely reckon with those who strengthen the hands of the wicked in their wickedness.

The sufferings of the magicians are especially mentioned.

III.—Wilful hardness is commonly punished with judicial hardness. If men shut their eyes against the light, it is just with God to close their eyes.

VII.

The Hail-storm—Exod. ix. 13-26.

This miracle and its sequel teach us—

I.—That God makes His irresponsible and unintelligent agents the means of instruction and conviction to His moral, responsible creatures.

Wise men have always considered that the observation of the laws of nature, which are God's method of working, is a means of education of the human mind. Some of these laws will make themselves observed, whether men will, or whether they will not. The transgression of them brings pain which comes without invitation, and so these abstract servants of God come to be moral teachers. Then there are those visible teachers, to which men are so often referred in the Divine word (Isa. x. 4-26 ; Ps. xix. 1, &c.), and which Paul declares are revealers of God to His intelligent creatures. (Rom. i. 20). The Psalmist tells us that the wind and the lightning are Divine Messengers and servants (*see Alexander on Ps.* civ. 4), and they were strikingly exemplified to be so in this miracle. The war of elements sent upon Egypt was intended and calculated to bring moral truths home to the Egyptian monarch and his people.

II.—That moral agents who have refused to be instructed by Divine teaching are kept in the world to be a means of instruction to others.

"For this cause I have raised thee up," or "made thee to stand to shew in thee my power," &c. (verse 16). "Thou, considered by thyself alone, art already doomed to condemnation. I establish thee as it were anew, in order to judge thee more completely, and to glorify my name in thee" *(Lange's Commentary).* There are vessels belonging to our navy which are past repair or improvement, and are therefore unfit for sea. Yet they are retained as light-ships along the coast, that they may be the means of preventing better ships from going to pieces on the rocks. So it was with Pharaoh, and so it has

been with many men since. Long and obstinate resistance to the commands of God would seem at last to deprive men of the capacity to receive Divine influence, and they are only useful as beacons to others.

III.—Those who have less authority in the world often have more wisdom.

Although the king persisted in hardening his heart, some of his servants were wise enough to regard the voice of Jehovah (verse 20). The former miracles had not wholly failed to produce an effect. Faith in the God of Israel had been begotten in some. As Paul had some saints in Cæsar's household (Phil. iv. 22), so Moses had some who believed his word in the court of Pharaoh.

IV.—That mere attrition will lead to increased stubbornness, and only contrition to a change of character.

Little weight can be attached to promises of amendment made while suffering from the consequences of wrong-doing. They are more likely to arise from sorrow for the penalty than from hatred to the sin. The former may, like the bar of iron that has been heated and allowed to cool many times, result in a more unyielding hardness; the latter is that "godly sorrow," which "worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Cor. vii. 10).

SELECTED.

I.—When God's justice threatens ruin, His mercy provides a way of escape (verse 19).

If Pharaoh will not yield, opportunity is given to others to escape this judgment. Those that will take warning, may take shelter.

II.—Obstinate infidelity is deaf to the fairest warnings and the wisest counsels.

Though every plague hitherto foretold had exactly answered the prediction, and though, if there had been any room to doubt, it would have done no harm to keep their cattle within

doors for one day—some were so foolhardy as to leave them in the field (verse 21).

III.—Judgments are sent, and are removed for the same end, viz., the glory of God.

When Moses interceded for the cessation of this plague, the end he aimed at was "that thou mayest know how that the earth is the Lord's" (verse 29).

VIII.

The Locusts—Exod. x. 12-15.

Notice—

I.—That, in some acts of the Divine government, numbers of finite creatures are necessary to accomplish the Infinite will.

God has many single-handed works which allow of no co-operation. The act of creation, past, present, and to come, is His alone. "With whom took he counsel?" &c. (Isa. xl. 14). "He that created the heavens," &c. (Isa. xlii. 5). "*Mine* hand hath laid the foundations of the earth," &c. (Isa. xlviii. 13). The work of redemption was wrought alone by God manifest in the flesh. "I have finished the work," &c. (John xvii. 4; Isa. lx. 5). His present work in heaven is one which no creature can share (Heb. i. 4, 5). But there are purposes of God which cannot be fulfilled without finite creatures. The peopleing of the earth—"He formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. xlv. 18). The accomplishment of the ingathering of His church—"Go ye into all the world," &c. (Mark xvi. 15). The peopleing of heaven (John xiv. 2; Rev. vii. 9). In the miracle before us, God's purpose was fulfilled by means of creatures beneath man.

II.—What is insignificant and powerless in itself becomes all but omnipotent when combined with many others, and unity of action increases immensely the power of numbers.

Snowflakes, taken by themselves, are powerless, but millions falling together have buried armies. The single raindrops do neither good nor harm, but unitedly they water the earth. Separate the ocean water into drops and they would be useless, but combined they carry fleets and form that mighty tomb which the Almighty alone can unlock. One locust might have been crushed by the foot, but Pharaoh's horses and chariots stood powerless before the immense multitude. Then, again, locusts are remarkable for their unity of action (Joel. ii. 7, 8), and this added to their irresistible might. The small number of Greeks who won the battle of Marathon would have utterly failed if they had been a disorderly mob, but their unity of movement and their compactness shivered the unwieldy hosts of Datis *(see Creasy)*.

LESSONS.

I.—Some of God's deeds are of more importance than others. Some deeds of *good men* are of more importance than other deeds of their life because they reveal their characters more distinctly than their ordinary deeds. Such was the one act of Arnold Winkelried, when he gathered as many Austrian spears to his breast as he could embrace, to make a path to liberty for his countrymen. Such was the one act of Cranmer, in thrusting into the fire the hand that signed his recantation. And such the one deed of Peabody when he gave away half-a-million of money to the poor of London. The one act of the Son of God, whose life was made up of sinless actions, is that in which He gave Himself to the death of the cross. This is the act which is sung in heaven (Rev. v. 9). "That thou mayest tell it," &c. (verse 2), seems to imply that God regarded these His dealings as especially worthy of note.

II.—Divine dealings have an immediate and a remote influence. "Tell it in the ears of thy son," &c. (verse 2). The decision arrived at by a judge to-day may be referred to and decide a case of law a hundred years hence. The deeds of any life have an after influence upon men. How much more the

dealings of God in the past are intended to influence men for the present. These wonders wrought in Egypt became the basis of Hebrew song in after times (Ps. cv.).

SELECTED.

I.—Though God has given the earth to the children of men, He can, when He pleases, disturb their possession.

Contemptible creatures cannot only be fellow-commoners, but plunderers, and eat the bread out of man's mouth.

II.—The day will come, when those who set at nought counsel, will be glad to engage their intercessions.

Pharaoh had driven Moses and Aaron from him (verse 11); but now he calls for them again in haste (verse 16). (See Ps. cxli. 6.)

III.—There are those, who, in distress, implore the help of other persons' prayers, but have no mind to pray for themselves.

Pharaoh had no mind to pray for himself, he desired that the plague may be removed, but not the sin. The foolish virgins court the wise to give them of their oil instead of seeking it for themselves.

IX.

THE DARKNESS—Exod. x. 21-23.

I.—The supernatural character of this darkness may be seen if we consider—

1.—That it visited the land on the action of a man. "Moses stretched forth his hand and there was a thick darkness" (verse 22). The interior of a house, or of the houses composing an entire city, may be wrapped in darkness at the bidding of man, because he holds a power to prevent the entrance of light, but no earthly power can bar its entrance upon the outside world. Man can make night within, but not without his dwelling. The darkness of Egypt was in the highways as well as in the houses.

2. Because darkness and light were existent at the same time in the same land. "Israel had light in their dwellings" (verse

23). If God were to arrest the motion of the earth when we were enjoying the full light of noon, so long as our world stood still we should have light, and the inhabitants of our antipodes would be enwrapped in darkness. God could easily thus make a division of the inhabitants of the globe, and though this could not have been the means used in Egypt, we can easily understand that He, who in the beginning "divided the light from the darkness," could produce the same effect in a different way. 3. No artificial light could penetrate this darkness. "They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days" (verse 23). For the time the Egyptians were as totally shut out from the world around them as if each one had been suddenly smitten with blindness.

Moral Suggestions.

Both in the natural and spiritual world we find that darkness is often a forerunner of death. When the dissolution of soul and body is at hand, we often find the dying person exclaim that the room is dark even if it is mid-day. The men of Sodom were struck with blindness (Gen. xix. 11), which seemed to foretell their approaching doom. So the Egyptian darkness foreshadowed the coming death. It was symbolic of the spiritual darkness that had settled upon the mind of Pharaoh. He seems up to this time to have retained the delusion that he should be able to prevent the exodus of Israel, or, at least, to keep their cattle as a hostage for their return. Such a state of mind is an exposition of the words of Paul, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii. 11). The darkness of *ignorance* must be followed by death; how much more that which is the result of a wilful closing of the spiritual eye against the light.

SELECTED.

Note—

I.—That although God ordinarily makes His sun to shine upon the evil and the good, He can make a difference. We must not take common mercies as a matter of course.

II.—Wherever there is an Israelite indeed, though in this dark world, there is light. There is still a real difference, though not so discernible a one, between the *house* of the wicked, which is under a *curse*, and the habitation of the just, which is *blessed* (Prov. iii. 33). We should believe in that difference and govern ourselves accordingly.

X.

The Death of the Firstborn—Exod. xii. 29.

In this visitation we notice—

I.—That a single blow is given in a moment for many received over a long period.

A man may be condemned to sudden death who has been guilty of many murders committed secretly at different times during a number of years. His execution settles the outstanding debt against humanity and human law in a few seconds. The one blow gives retribution for many. King Pharaoh and his subjects, and their ancestors, had been the murderers of the Hebrew children for eighty years. Many a mother's heart during that time had refused to be comforted, because her firstborn was not. The Judge of all the earth had made no sign, but "He that keepeth Israel" had not slumbered (Ps. cxxi. 3). The long-standing account was now settled in a single night.

II.—That the justice which had been refused to be rendered from choice, was now wrung from Egypt by an appeal to her selfishness (verses 33-36).

There can be no doubt that the Egyptians had grown rich upon the unpaid labour of Israel; but God had determined that there should be an inquisition for wages as well as for blood (Ps. ix. 12), and the payment for both came in a lump sum.

Lessons.

I.—National crimes will be visited with national punishment.

II.—All labour will receive its wages. If those who earn

them do not receive it, their heirs will. By a natural law of God, water finds its level. He has a financial law also by which work and wages come to a level. In a work of fiction the author generally brings the property to the rightful owner at last, though it may have been long withheld. So the Divine Ruler will hand over the balance to those to whom it belongs in due time, if not in money, in money's worth. There is a levelling up, and a levelling down in His government.

III.—God will have His special deeds to be commemorated. The overthrow of a tyrant is an event which men generally deem worthy of commemoration, because they look upon it as a merciful dispensation. God countenances this feeling. "O, give thanks unto the Lord . . . who slew famous kings, for His mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. cxxxvi. ; Isa. xl. 23, 24). "This day shall be unto you for a memorial" (ch. xii. 14).

IV.—The feast growing out of this, the last of the plagues, contains both analogies and contrasts to its antitype in the New Testament dispensation.

1. The Passover celebrated the central fact of Jewish history, and formed a basis of communion for all the tribes of Israel. The Lord's Supper celebrates the central fact of Gospel history, and forms a common basis of communion for all Christians. 2. The Passover was instituted by God before Israel's redemption was wrought. The Lord's Supper was instituted before our Lord wrought man's redemption. 3. The Passover sets forth a deliverance by *death*, not by *miracle ;* the Lord's Supper sets forth a deliverance by the Saviour's *death*, not by His *miracles*. 4. Those who partook of the Jewish Passover proclaimed a redemption from bodily bondage ; those who partake of the Lord's Supper rejoice in a deliverance from the bondage of sin (Col. i. 15). 5. The commemoration of the lesser redemption has been abolished by the greater, as the blade and the green ear are abolished by the full corn which yet includes them, and as the infancy and childhood of the Son of man were abolished by His manhood, which included

them. Christ destroyed the law and the prophets by fulfilling them (Matt. v. 17; Heb. ix. 11).

SELECTED—I.

I.—Invisible messengers of God are used, when visible ones are debarred.

Pharaoh may exclude Moses and Aaron, but cannot shut out God's angel.

II.—Evermore, when God's messengers are abandoned, destruction is near.

Pharaoh says to Moses "Get thee from me," and Moses sees him no more till he is dead upon the sands.

III.—This plague had been the first threatened (ch. iv. 23), but was the last executed. See how slow God is to wrath.

Bishop Hall and Matt. Henry.

SELECTED—II.

The nature and intent of the Plagues of Egypt.

It is evident that in the days of Moses, the Israelites, to some degree, practised the superstitions of Egypt (Exod. xxxii. 1-9; Josh. xxiv. 14, &c.), and it is observable that God, through the course of His manifestations, had chiefly in view the convincing of Israel, as well as Egypt and the rest of the nations, that He alone was the true God, and that there was none else beside Him. It is the fundamental principle of Divine government, to work upon rational creatures in a rational manner. The most rational method of reclaiming people from error is to make it plain to their understanding that things are, in fact, just the reverse of what they conceive. Apply this to the case before us.

These miracles may be easily reduced to *four classes*, and were transacted in the *four elements*, which were esteemed in Egypt the four principal deities.

I.—The Egyptians held *Water* in high veneration, more particularly the river Nile, as the source of their choicest blessings. God's depriving it of all utility was a likely means of

convincing them that the river was His own. If they were, as it is said, so barbarous as, at a particular season, to stain its current with human sacrifices, then His turning the water into blood was an especially suitable punishment.

Then again, the banks of this river were the grand scene of their magical operations, in which blood and frogs made the principal part of the apparatus, frogs being not only the instruments of their abominations, but also the emblems of those impure demons whom they invoked by their incantations.

II.—The *Earth* was an object of their worship, to which they offered up the first fruits of harvest. God now reversed the nature of its productions, causing it to bring forth lice. And because they held the cattle of the field—yea, noisome beasts, reptiles, and insects—for gods, therefore the former were killed by a murrain, and a mixture of the latter (Exod. viii. 21-24, margin) were sent to torment them, that they might experimentally know that wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished (Wisd. xi. 16).

III.—The *Air* was another of their chief divinities, to whom they attributed the salubrity of their climate, and whom they therefore sought to propitiate by offerings of daily incense *(see Herodotus and Plutarch).* God now rendered it pestilential, exciting inflamed tumours and virulent ulcers, both in man and beast. He likewise caused it to produce such storms as had hitherto been unknown. And the east wind, which they adored, brought locusts.

IV.—The supreme objects of their worship were the *Sun*, *Moon*, and *Stars*. Jehovah suspended their lights, and covered the land with darkness. To these miracles, in proof of His sovereignty, God added one more, as a demonstration of His providence. The death of the first-born bore so natural a relation to their sin, in destroying every male of the Israelites, that they must have perceived it was inflicted as a punishment for that cruelty, and consequently might have concluded that

the God of Israel took particular cognizance of human transactions.

The *manner* in which they were wrought was admirably calculated to exclude or obviate every suggestion of prejudice, and to forward every good emotion which reflection might inspire.

I.—As the Egyptians, who had high notions of the art of sorcery, might imagine that Moses performed these prodigies by some fascination, their own magicians were freely permitted to exercise their skill to the utmost, but in vain. Although these seducers had made the people believe that they could secure their persons and property from all kinds of evil, they were now seen involved in the common calamities.

II.—The people were forewarned of the day when every plague should befall them, and permitted to assign their own time for their removal, whereby they might clearly see that God alone was the Author, both of their sufferings and deliverance.

III.—These miraculous judgments came upon them by leisurely advances, and proper intervals were allowed for reflection and repentance.

IV.—The obvious visible distinction between the two nations might lead to the conclusion that Jehovah was as truly gracious to the obedient as He was terribly severe to the rebellious.—*Owen's Intent and Propriety of Scripture Miracles. Boyle Lectures.* 1769-71.

SELECTED—III.

I.—Observe the *order* in which these successive strokes are arranged, and their gradual advance from the mediate to the immediate hand of God. They are in number ten, which is one of the numbers denoting perfection. They are divided first into nine; and one, the last one, stands apart from all the others. The nine are arranged in threes. In the first of each three the warning is given to Pharaoh in the morning (vii. 15;

viii. 20; ix. 13). In the first and second of each three, the plague is announced beforehand (viii. 1; ix. 1; x. 1), in the third not (viii. 16; ix. 8; x. 21). In the first three Aaron uses the rod; in the second three it is not mentioned. In the third three Moses uses it, though only his hand is mentioned. All these marks of order lie on the face of the narrative and point to a deeper order of nature and reason from which they spring.

II.—Note the gradation in the severity of the strokes.

In the first three no distinction is made among the inhabitants of the land; in the remaining seven Israel is exempted. Three refer to the animal creation, and three to the vegetable world, the support of animal life. The last of these six is darkness, and the seventh is death. The first three affect the health and comfort of man; the next three take away the staff of life; then comes death itself.

III.—Understand the deep import of the conflict.

Bear in mind that now, for the first time since the dispersion of mankind, the opposition between the children of God and the children of disobedience is coming out into broad daylight. This nation is, for the time being, the representative of all heathendom, which is the kingdom of the Prince of Darkness; and the battle here fought is the type of all future warfare between the seed of the woman and the serpent. Hence its transcendent importance, and hence it fitly holds a place in the preface to the ten commandments.—*Murphy.*

SELECTED—IV.

The change from a rod into a serpent, and from a serpent back again into a rod, may have reference to the serpent-worship which prevailed in Egypt. The serpent was there regarded as an emblem of divine wisdom and power, and as such it was reverenced. The transformation of Aaron's rod into a serpent, and the swallowing up of all the other serpents by it, was therefore calculated to impress the Egyptians with the greatness and supremacy of the God of Israel.

The plague of lice was a reproof to the Egyptians for th

uncleanness of their religious ceremonies, which were carried on under an outward show of purity. The Egyptian priests were very particular not to harbour any vermin, and considered it a dreadful profanation of their temple, if any creeping things were carried into them. Now, polluted as they were, they could not enter into their temples, nor had they any victims fit to offer for sacrifice, for the animals were also defiled.

The plague of darkness may have been produced by a deprivation of sight. The sun may have set as usual upon the land, yet the eyes of all the Egyptians being closed and blinded, no ray of light could reach them; this, if it were attended with pain in the organs of vision, might be properly described as "darkness to be felt." The men of Sodom were stricken with blindness for their sin, and so was the host which came to take Elisha. Moses, when he threatens Israel with the botch of Egypt, reminding them of the plague of boils, says immediately afterwards, alluding probably to this plague, "The Lord shall smite thee with blindness," &c. (Deut. xxviii. 27-29). Blindness was the punishment inflicted upon Elymas the sorcerer; and the Egyptians were famous for their sorceries. The darkness therefore may have been a painful but temporary loss of eyesight. But whatever the cause, it was a condition full of horror and misery represented most forcibly in the sentence, "Neither rose any from his place for three days." Pharaoh might call in vain for his guards; they could not come to him. Moses and Aaron were no longer within reach, for none could reach them. Masters could not command their slaves, nor slaves obey their masters' call; the wife could not flee to the husband, nor the child cling to its parent; the same paralysing fear possessed them every one. As says Job, they "laid hold on horror" (Job xviii. 20). If there be any truth in Jewish tradition there were yet greater alarms. Darkness is a type of Satan's kingdom, and Jewish Rabbis tell us that the devil and his angels were let loose during these three dreadful days. They describe them as frightening the wretched people with fearful apparitions, and hideous shrieks and groans. Such a climax seems to be referred to in Psa. lxxviii. 49.—*Millington.*

THE DIVIDING OF THE RED SEA.

"*And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea: and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground,*" *etc.*—Exod. xiv. 21-22.

I.—This dividing of the sea was miraculous—

1. Because it took place and the waters closed again upon the outstretching of the hand of Moses, in fulfilment of his word (Exod. xiv. 13). The sea is less manageable by man, perhaps, than any other force of nature. "The sea is God's, and He made it" (Psalm xcv. 5), and to Him only will it render obedience. Its obedience in this case to Moses was, therefore, the result of a supernatural interposition. 2. Because the waters stood upright on each side of the path. When waves roll back and leave their bed dry for a short space of time, they break and return again; a strong wind would drive back the water on one side only, and leave the water perhaps knee-deep or ankle-deep, but the wall of water on each side and the dry land in the middle could have been produced by miraculous power alone.

II.—The fact of the miracle is proved by the present existence of the nation which was that day born.

No nation in the world, except the Hebrews, can point to the place and the day in which it began its national existence. All other ancient nations have lost their identity, but the Jews retain theirs, and the miracle of the Red Sea has always been the foundation fact of their history (Isa. lxiii. 12; Psa. lxviii. 22, etc., etc.).

LESSONS.

I.—The attainment of moral ends is more important than physical convenience. The Israelites could have entered Canaan by a much nearer way than through the Red Sea, but

that way was chosen for them to teach them many important truths in connection with God. The shortest way to attain an end is not always the best way. A short way to a fortune may not be so conducive to the formation of a character, as one which it takes much longer to travel. This truth is taught in the temptation of our Saviour (Luke iv. 5-8). Satan proposed a short way to that universal dominion which our Lord knew could only be safely and truly attained through Gethsemane and Calvary.

II.—The attainment of moral ends is more important than the uninterrupted operation of the ordinary laws of nature. This is not at all surprising. The laws of nature are God's servants, and it is only reasonable to expect that when He can reveal His power and His mercy better by suspending their action, and operating as it were upon the forces of the world without their instrumentality, He should do so. When the special end is accomplished they return to their wonted service.

III.—The attainment of moral ends is more important than the preservation of bodily life. This is an acknowledged fact. The life of a rebel is considered of less importance than the upholding of the law that condemns him to death. The lives of many men are often considered of less importance than the establishment and upholding of freedom, and the downfall of that which degrades the higher life of the human race and prevents its development.

SELECTED—I.

When the Christian life is first communicated to the soul it is small and feeble. Severe temptations might then be fatal. He, therefore, who commences and maintains the process of salvation, *gradually* accustoms his soldiers to the difficulties of their warfare. This is the reason of the Divine procedure in relation to the leading of the Israelites by the longer course of the Red Sea rather than by the shorter one through the land of the Philistines. If they had encountered the Philistines at this

time they would probably have retreated and sought refuge from the enemy before them in the bondage from which they had just escaped.

Notice—

I.—The circumstances of the Israelites.

1. The Philistines, who lay before them, were a brave and warlike people, against whom they could not hope to succeed in battle. Wisely, therefore, did the Lord lead the people by another way; and as wisely, although often as mysteriously, does God often turn aside the young believer from a way in which he might encounter foes as yet too strong for him. 2. The Israelites were unarmed, while the Philistines were furnished with every means of offence and defence. The men of Israel were wholly ignorant of war, and could not have used warlike weapons with any skill. So the young Christian, although he may put on the "whole armour of God," needs practice in the use of it. 3. The spirits of the children of Israel were bowed down by long captivity. And the long servitude of sin, superinduced upon natural corruption, unfits men for becoming immediately valiant combatants with spiritual foes.

II.—The dealings of God towards them.

1. He avoided the way of danger and led them by the path of safety. They must have been astonished and possibly disposed to murmur, as the passenger, ignorant of the dangers of the voyage, seeing the shipmaster direct his vessel into a course contrary to that in which he thinks the destined port lies, cannot repress his wonder. So when we are turned from the way of our imagination, God is only accommodating His dealings to our infirmity. 2. He led them through the dangers of the Red Sea, and brought them to sojourn in the wilderness of Sin. So, though spared the peculiar trial to which they were unequal, every virtue which God required would be called into exercise. It is the exclusive province of unerring wisdom to draw an exact line between the discipline necessary for our advancement and that severity which might

overwhelm us. "He led them by a *right* way." Let us learn, then, to leave the choice of our course simply and solely to God.—*Adapted from Buddicom's Christian Exodus.*

SELECTED—II.

Notice several salutary consequences of this great wonder.

I.—The fear of the Lord, that reverential and submissive feeling, which is the beginning of wisdom, was called forth by the awful grandeur of the scene.

II.—Trust in the Lord was awakened by the discriminating result in which an awful doom fell upon Israel's adversaries, and a great salvation was accomplished for themselves.

III.—Confidence in Moses was now established.

IV.—A lesson was given to all nations within hearing to return to the God of their being, and submit themselves to His rightful authority.—*Murphy.*

THE HEALING OF THE WATERS OF MARAH.

"*And when they came to Marah they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. . . . And he (Moses) cried unto the Lord, and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.*"—Exod. xv. 23-25.

There are three theories concerning this miracle. 1. That the tree contained properties which only needed to be brought into contact with the waters to make them drinkable. 2. That the tree had no such property *naturally*, but was specially endowed with it by God for the present need. 3. That the tree had no influence upon the waters, but that they were healed by the direct power of God, and the casting in of the branch was simply a test of the obedience of Moses. It

matters not which theory is accepted, as either would be an example of supernatural intervention; for if we suppose the first one to be correct, Moses, by his prayer, confesses himself to be as powerless to change the waters of Marah as he had been to change the waters of the Nile. If we adopt the second, we can easily conceive that God, who has endowed each plant with its peculiar qualities, could have given to this tree a special power which it had not possessed before; and if we accept the last we have a miracle of the same character as the healing by the brazen serpent (Num. xxi. 8), which came direct from God and was not effected by any intervening instrumentality. From the incident we may learn:

I.—That we may be instrumental in bringing about ends and yet remain in entire ignorance of the laws or methods by which they are attained.

Moses had been used by God to turn the waters of the Nile into blood, and the waters of the Red Sea into walls of protection, but he had gained no insight into the mysteries of God's working thereby, and stands before Marah just as powerless as though he had never been the instrument of these marvels. He was instrumental in working miracles during the whole of his forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, but we have no reason to think that he could explain the method of God's working when he sat upon Mount Nebo, any better than when he kept his flock upon Mount Horeb. Is not this the case with all of us in relation to the commonest actions of our life? Who can tell how the mind influences the brain, etc.? There are many secret things very near home which belong to the Lord alone.

II.—New circumstances bring new tests of faith and obedience.

"There he *proved* them and said, if thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord," etc. (verse 26). The Israelites were now in very different circumstances from those which surrounded them in Egypt, but they were met by new trials in order to prove the depth of their confidence in God,

and by new proofs of His power and goodness to stimulate them to a more unwavering obedience than they had yet displayed.

III.—Human obedience is the condition of Divine healing.

Certain rules must be obeyed by the patient if the power and skill of the physician are to be manifested in his healing. So in the healing of the spiritual nature, certain conditions must be fulfilled. "If any man will *do* His will, he shall know of the doctrine," etc. (John vii. 17).

IV.—God is the author of all healing.

He owned the tree that healed the waters. The Christ of the gospel is God's (1 Cor. iii. 22). He is the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev. xxii. 2). As the Lord showed Moses the tree (verse 25), so has he caused the gospel of salvation to be brought nigh to the children of men.

SELECTED—I.

I.—There are four bitter things of which Marah's waters are a likeness.

1. The bitterness of man's *heart*. The natural heart is, by nature, a bitter fountain sending forth its bitter waters. 2. The bitterness of man's *afflictions*. Affliction was *intended* to be a bitter thing to flesh and blood, for it was part of that punishment which sin brought with it. 3. The bitterness of God's wrath which we have incurred. The displeasure of Him whose favour is life, from whom *alone* all good cometh. 4. The bitterness of the death that we must die. This is as the waters of Marah to an ungodly man—"the sting of death is sin."

II.—Let us see what answers to the *tree*, which, being cast into the waters, made them sweet. The gospel is able to sweeten all the bitters.

1.—*The wrath of God.* Jesus cast Himself into those bitter

waters and made them sweet. It was the very God who made the waters bitter who pointed out the means of healing them. It was the very God "to whom vengeance belongeth" who hath sent His Son into the world to save us from it. 2. *Affliction.* It furnishes a *motive* for patience and an *example* to encourage. 3. *The heart of man.* The fountain of the heart is cleansed by grace. 4. *Death.* To him who cordially believes in Jesus, the sting of death is drawn by sin being covered.—*Arthur Roberts.*

SELECTED—II.

There is for us, as we pass each through his own wilderness, a Marah also. Some afflictions there are which are inevitable to every child of Adam, but others meet us when we least expect them. In youth we make up our minds that, if the world, as a whole, must be granted to be a wilderness, it shall at least be a pleasant wilderness to us. So, like Israel, before they came to Marah, we plant this wilderness with joyous springs, sweet to the taste. And even after the experience of many disappointments, we often look forward to some one especial point in life which we feel certain will bring felicity at last. Like the thirsty Israelites, we hasten forward, even at some sacrifice; we reach the spring, we stoop to taste. Alas! it is bitter.

Thou who art brooding over thine own Marah, cry unto the Lord, as Moses did, and He will shew thee a tree. Plant His cross in thine embittered heart, and by His grace, this spring of disappointment shall become less and less bitter, till nothing but sweetness shall remain.—*E. Caswall on the Seen and the Unseen.*

THE GIVING OF THE MANNA.

"*And Moses said, This is the bread,*" *etc.*—Exod. xvi. 15.

It will be seen that the manna was a miraculous gift if we consider the narrative—

I.—In the light of infallible teaching.

If we desire to obtain information upon any subject, we consult those who are known authorities upon it, and from their opinions we draw our conclusions. Their views upon the matter may be obtained either from their *declaration* or their *admission*. That which they *admit* when declared by others may be taken as well as that which they *declare*. In our Lord's discourse upon the giving of the manna in John vi., he implies that it was a miraculous gift. The Jews had been contrasting it with the miracle which He had just wrought to the disparagement of the latter. He had only given them one meal on one day, whereas Moses had given their fathers two meals each day for forty years. Christ assents to their thus placing the two miracles in contrast, and by implication declares the giving of the manna to be a miracle as much as that of the increase of the loaves and fishes.

II.—In the light of the after history of the Jews.

History is a record of events which took place in bygone times, a relation of common or uncommon dealings of God's providence. But for none of these do the historians of other nations claim, as a rule, miraculous interventions, except perhaps in those cases where individuals have been supernaturally sustained when they endured extraordinary sufferings in the cause of God. But in the case of the Jews it is different. Indeed, it has been remarked that "a narrative about any other people becomes less credible when miraculous events are paraded; but a narrative of the Jews is less credible when such events are wanting" (*Cowie's Hulsean Lectures on Scripture Difficulties*). We see, from their after history,

that they were destined to play a particular part in human history, and we therefore expect an exception to ordinary rules in their case. To deny the miracle of the manna is to deny the wilderness journey, and all that took place during its continuance, and to deny the history of the Jewish nation as recorded by its own historical writers (see Psa. lxxxiii.), etc., etc.

III.—In the light of the contrast between the ordinary manna of the wilderness, and the manna which sustained Israel.

1. The natural productions of the same name now found in the same region, and found there doubtless in the days of Moses, are articles used as *medicine* and as *condiments*, never as common food. The manna of the Hebrews was *food*, pleasant to the taste, and nourishing to the body. 2. The natural manna is found only from May to August. The Jews found their food all the year. 3. The ordinary manna is never found in sufficient quantities to feed two millions of people. Israel received about three English quarts per day for each man. 4. The manna now found in Arabia is not a *Sabbath keeper;* it will spoil on the Sabbath as much as on any other day; on the other hand, it will keep longer than the miraculous manna did on ordinary days (verse 20). Moreover, a double quantity is never known to be forthcoming on one day of the week periodically for years together. This was the case with the miraculous manna (verses 22-24). 5. The natural production is found to-day; that which fed Israel ceased to be given when ordinary food could be obtained (Josh. v. 12). If the present manna had been increased by God to such an amount as to have fed the Israelites, this would have been a miracle, but this would only have accounted for the *quantity*, not for the difference in the nature and qualities of the two productions.

IV.—In the light of the memorial which was preserved of it (verse 32).

The manna of the present day was found in the days of the exodus, and was within reach of the generations who came after. There would have been no need to preserve a sample of it. But God would have some of the pleasant food, with which He fed His people, preserved as a standing evidence to after ages of the miracle which He wrought.

Suggestions.

I.—The thoughts of God, revealed in His word, are the soul's manna. "Man doth not live by bread only," &c. (Deut. viii. 3). "The words that I speak unto you . . . are *life*" (John vi. 63). This manna is within our reach. The word of God is printed in our mother tongue, and is spoken by the living voice of His messengers (Rom. x. 8). But we must gather that which lies around our camp.

II.—Soul manna unused will condemn us. God sent Israel the manna to feed upon; if they did not use it, it condemned their disobedience (verses 19, 20; Matt. xxv. 25-28).

SELECTED—I.

In this miracle of the manna notice—

I.—Every man had a sufficient proportion.

As there was nothing over on the one hand, so there was no lack on the other. God, who is the great Master of the family, the Father of the universe, sets the measure, and puts the bounds to every one's appetite; He knows what we really need, and provides for us accordingly.

Thou who aboundest in wealth, know that a small matter will serve thy turn if thou wilt but keep within the compass of those necessities which common life has laid upon thee; and the overplus of thy gathering will but load thy back and thy conscience here, and burden thine account hereafter. And thou, poor man, trust in God and go out a-gathering, and thy allowance shall find thee out.

II.—It was as satisfactory in the quality of it, as sufficient in the quantity.

Providence, though it has diversified mankind in outward conditions, yet has levelled us as to inward satisfactions. The mean man may be as happy as the highest, if his mind be but rightly affected. Satisfaction lies not in the *bag*, but in the mind of the owner. Learn—

1.—Contentedness with that portion God has assigned for us. If it is with thee as God has appointed thee, thou art so well off, thou canst not be better.

2.—Diligence in our place and state of life, to go out and gather what He has allotted. God's gifts deserve our pains as well as our thanks.

3.—Trust in God's providence. What can we require more, than to have according to our eating? And what can we look for less, if, as God is *provident* for us, we be *prudent* for ourselves?—*Adam Littleton, D.D.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—This bread from heaven was *entirely undeserved.* Past and promised mercies were alike forgotten, and the supplies of the tyrant remembered with a mean and guilty regret. So with the gift of Christ to man, it was undeserved.

II. It was supplied *mysteriously* and *miraculously.* It differed altogether from everything on which Israel had fed in Egypt. So with the mystery of "the word made flesh." It was no small part of the mystery that the manna was suitable to every period and condition of life. So with the Gospel.

III.—Valuable as the manna was to the tribes of Israel, it was bestowed in *unfailing abundance.* So the sacrifice of Jesus Christ provides plenteous redemption for all. The material manna was not more impartially divided than the Saviour, whom it typified, is offered to all without exception.

We are taught—

1.—The necessity of taking no care for the morrow. No store *could* be accumulated by Israel.

2.—The reverence due to the Sabbath day.

3.—A liberal contribution to the wants of others. It seems that all the members of a family cast the manna which they had collected into a common stock, and that when it was measured out, if any quantity remained after the distribution of an omer to each it was given to those who had not been able to procure so much.

4.—Diligence in fulfilling the duties of life, and improving the means of salvation. The manna vanished when the sun was risen, and was therefore to be sought early.

5.—Remembrance of the mercies of God. Aaron was commanded to preserve a pot full of manna, and to lay it up before the Lord.—*Buddicom's Christian Exodus.*

WATER FROM THE ROCK IN HOREB.

"*Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock,*" *&c.*—Exod. xvii. 6.

Notice—

I.—That the place of the miracle was calculated to increase the faith of the man who was to be the instrument of performing it—"the rock in Horeb."

God appeared first to Moses in Horeb (chap. iii. 1). The return to places which God has fixed indelibly upon our minds by some special manifestation of His providential favour, is very helpful to every man's faith. It was so to Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 10), when God said to him, "Arise, go up to Bethel" (Gen. xxxv. 1). He intended to use the place as a means of arousing him to increased faith and obedience by the remembrances of former mercies received there. So in the case of

Moses. The return to Horeb would enable him to draw from the past some compensation for the trying circumstances of the present (verses 2-4). The very sight of the place in which God had given him promises (ch. iii. 10-20) which had since been fulfilled, would give him hope for the future.

II.—The temptation connected with the miracle.

The murmuring and chiding of Israel against Moses is said to be *tempting God*. The miracles already wrought by Moses had been an abundant confirmation of His Divine commission. God had in the past so identified His servant with Himself that to murmur against Him was finding fault with his and their God.

III.—The nature of the miracle.

1. The water from the rock was a miracle because it gushed forth at the moment when Moses smote the rock, as the Lord had said. The people by their murmuring had fully admitted that no water could be obtained from natural sources. God never supplies our wants by supernatural means when they can be satisfied by the operation of the ordinary laws of nature. 2. But though miraculous, it was connected with human agency. Moses smote the rock, and God gave the water. The rod was in the hand of Moses, the power in the hand of God. Peter took the lame man by the hand, and God gave him the power to walk (Acts iii. 7).

LESSON.

God can bring good to His people from the most unlikely sources. Nothing seemed more unlikely to yield water than the barren rock of Horeb. So God often brings refreshing streams of comfort to His people out of hard circumstances. Paul and Silas could sing in the dungeon, and their imprisonment was made the means of adding to their converts in Philippi. The lot of John in Patmos seemed hard and dreary indeed, but at the bidding of Christ, streams of living water

gushed forth there, which refreshed the soul of the apostle at the time, and have followed the church until the present. Out of the sufferings of the martyrs came joy to themselves and blessings to their descendants. Above all, out of the hard circumstances of the crucified Lord of glory, God has brought forth waters of everlasting life.

SELECTED—I.

Consider—

I.—The *source* of the waters.

1. Its durability and unchangeableness. It was a rock, and one of peculiar solidity and strength. Time has not been able either to destroy or materially to alter it. So the Rock of Ages is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." 2. It was chosen by God Himself. So Jesus is a Saviour of his own appointment. 3. It was opened according to Divine appointment by the hand of man. It was a smitten rock. So Jesus "gave His back to the smiters." And man gave the blow.

II.—The stream that flowed from the rock.

1. It *saved Israel from perishing.* This was its chief use. And it saved them when nothing else could save them. So with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 2. It did *more than save.* Enabling them to wash away the defilements of the desert, it cleaned the Israelites. Sin pollutes while it destroys. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin because by it He obtained for His church the gift of the Holy Ghost. 3. It *refreshed* them. Their strength was so renewed that they rose up, and after fighting a whole day with the Amalekites, they overcame them, and pressed on with fresh vigour to Canaan. In like manner the waters of life refresh the people of God.—*Charles Bradley.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—God evermore keeps us short of something because He would keep faith still in exercise.

Before, Israel thirsted and was satisfied; after that, they hungered and were filled; now they thirst again. None but our last enemy comes once for all. So must we take leave of our afflictions, that we must reserve a lodging for them, and expect their return.

II.—It is not of necessity that we fare ill, but out of God's choice.

He who could bring water out of stone could have conducted Israel to another Elim, or convenient watering, but He draws them into this want, to convince and shame their infidelity.

III.—Means must be used and yet their efficacy must be expected out of themselves.

God could have done without the rod of Moses; but He will do it by means. There was no virtue in either the rod or the stroke, but all in the command of God.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD.

"*And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle: . . . and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning,*" &c.—Numb. ix. 15-23. See also Exod. xl. 36-38.

I.—The Pillar of Cloud was miraculous—

1. Because it was always in the same form—an upright pillar (Neh. ix. 12). Ordinary clouds are seen in all kinds of form, and change every moment. They vary more than any other visible thing, being dependent upon the constantly changing currents of air. But the cloudy pillar was always the same. 2. It was always distinctly recognisable from every other cloud. While the tabernacle rested it never shifted its position; when Israel was on the march it held its place before them. Ordinary clouds, we know, are constantly driven before

the wind like slaves before a taskmaster. The rock that stands motionless in the midst of the stream, declares by *that*, that it differs from the water that flows past it. So did the pillar of cloud declare, by its power to remain stationary, that it was entirely different from ordinary clouds. 3. It underwent such a miraculous transformation. It was a shade by day, and fire by night. Ordinary clouds, when illumined by the sun's rays, become transformed and glorified, and form a spectacle to be wondered at. But this glory is only seen at the rising or setting of the sun, and it disappears when the sun is below the horizon. But the Israelites' cloud was bright only in the absence of the sun, or if there was any brightness during the day, it was independent of the sun, and increased when that light had set. Christ accounts for the daily light we enjoy in the words, "He *maketh* His sun to rise upon the evil and the good" (Matt. v. 45). So God *made* this night sun to shine upon the evil and the good in the camp of Israel. 4. From its onward movement it formed a guide to the nation. There is nothing in nature more independent of man's power than the clouds; this cloud became Israel's servant for forty years, marking out the path they were to take in the wilderness. It was in an especial manner their guide at the Red Sea, shedding a light upon their way, and enveloping their enemies in darkness. From all these considerations we conclude that He, of whom it is written that "The clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nahum i. 3), interposed in a supernatural manner for His people when, "in the daytime He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire" (Psa. lxxviii. 14).

Suggestion.

Human souls need more than the light of nature. The sun was useful to Israel as far as it went, but it did not go far enough to meet all their needs. Another light was needed to guide them. So the light of conscience is a good guide to man to a certain extent. Christ admits this when He says, "Why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right?"

(Luke xii. 57). But if this were sufficient, why did the Eternal Father give us the other and greater light, the "dayspring from on high" to guide our feet? How can we say that our natural light is enough when He has given us the supernatural? He evidently considers that we cannot do without this greater Light any more than Israel could have done without the "fiery, cloudy pillar."

SELECTED—I.

The pillar of cloud was *sacramental* and *typical.* On the first point Paul is explicit (1 Cor. x. 1, 2). Its typical character, as a symbol of God's presence with His church and in the hearts of His people, is referred to by Isaiah (ch. iv. 5). The cloud was manifestly intended—

I.—To guide the Israelites through the wilderness.

1. It guided with *infallible certainty.* It differed so palpably from every other appearance in the sky that only wilful blindness could mistake it. So does the revelation of God in His Word from all human rules and systems of morality. 2. It was a *constant* director. So the Word of Jesus Christ, in the Bible, guides every step in the journey of life.

II. It *protected* Israel in their march.

When pursued by Pharaoh, it not only guarded them, but prevented them even from *seeing* the terrors which menaced them. Such an ample guard does the believer possess in the presence of God from the enemy who thirsts to regain him as his prey.

III.—It gave them *refreshment* and *comfort* in the wilderness.

They could not have passed along the desert by day, fainting with the unmitigated fierceness of the sunbeams reflected from the interminable wastes of sand around them, unless some provision had been made in their behalf. From the language of Paul we may imagine that it was not only a *covering*, but that it was surcharged with a grateful humidity which it shed upon

the people. In the night season, too, the pillar of fire would temper the cold and damps of darkness. So the dew of the Father's love descends upon the Christian, when the sun of temptation beats upon him, and so in the gloomy night of affliction God's comfort will dissipate the blackness of sorrow. —*Buddicom.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—It is vain to follow any other light to guide except that which comes from the tabernacle. "The cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle."

He that knows the voice of Christ will not follow the voice of any stranger.

II.—As the tabernacle was *hidden* by the cloud, so the mysteries of Christ cannot be discerned until the hand of God reveals them.

The saints cannot see them, except it be given them from above; much more the natural man perceiveth not the things of God. In the time of a saint's greatest light, there is still some cloud upon the Lord's tabernacle. When Paul was raised to his greatest height, a prick was sent him in the flesh; and therefore he says, "We walk by faith, not by sight."

III.—As the fire only shined by night, so when man's spirit sees no light, then is the time for the appearing of God's light.

This light never appears but when all things are dark to man; for light discovers darkness; if anything else be light to thee, and all things else be not darkness, thou never yet discoverest this light.—*John Webster.*

THE GIVING OF THE QUAILS.

"*And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea,*" *&c.*—Numb. xi. 31.

We have here—

I.—Mental dissatisfaction the occasion of bodily satisfaction.

The patient who is discontented with his prescribed diet, and who tells his physician that he will have other food, may arouse such displeasure in his physician's mind as to be given up by him to the satisfaction of his appetite at all risks. His dissatisfaction with his best friend will rouse a corresponding dissatisfaction in that friend's mind with him, and both may result in the satisfaction of the bodily desires of the patient. The Hebrews murmured at the provision appointed for them by God. God was, in consequence, displeased with them, and the mutual feeling resulted in their desire being granted. God had, in a former miracle, claimed to be the physician, not only of the body, but of the *national character* under certain conditions (Exod. xv. 26). We here find them breaking through those conditions by their rebellion against His providence.

II.—The manner in which the bodily desires were satisfied.

"*There went out a strong wind,*" *&c.*

It was miraculous—1. Because the quails came at the exact time when they were promised. No one but God can use the word "shall" without qualification. Man's will is limited by his finite power. With him *probability*, not *certainty*, is the guide of life. The arrival of the Atlantic steamer may be announced for a certain day, but she may never come. The express train may be timed for a certain hour, but it may never reach its destination notwithstanding. The Company cannot absolutely promise that it shall be so. But with God, to promise and to fulfil are the same thing. 2. Because the

birds came in such vast multitudes within such easy reach of the people. There were enough and to spare to satisfy the wants of two millions of people.

III.—The human and Divine dissatisfaction led to a bodily satisfaction, which was destruction (v. 33).

The servant who knows that his master has given him what he desired in his displeasure, will sometimes, if he has any regard for him, refuse to partake of the granted gift. The displeasure of the master takes away the power to enjoy that which he has granted. But Israel had no such feeling towards their God. They would not forego the gratification of their palate, although they must have been perfectly aware of God's displeasure. So little store they set upon the favour of God. God, therefore, took *them* from the gift.

LESSON.

The answer of unconditional prayers may be our destruction. We read a fable of a man who was so greedy of gain that he prayed that all he touched might turn to gold. His prayer was granted: his very food became gold, and he died of starvation. Only One has ever been able to offer unqualified prayer, and He has taught us, by His example, "not to venture where angels fear to tread," for even He sometimes said, "If thou be willing" (Luke xxii. 42).

SELECTED—I.

Notice—

I.—Israel's Sin.

1. Its *nature*. A sin of the heart—covetousness. It is not spiritual idolatry, though it is like it. That is making too much of what we have; this is making too much of what we want. Rachel was guilty of it when she said, "Give me children, or I die." Ahab was deeply sunk in it when he longed

for Naboth's vineyard. 2. Its *cause.* It did not arise from want, for there fell daily for them food from the clouds. It had its origin in their unsubdued minds. 3. Its *occasion.* The mixed multitude that was among the people fell a-lusting (Numb. xi. 4), and then the Israelites, contaminated by their example, lusted also. To associate with men of the world is to have a worldly mind. 4. Its *effect—i.e.*, its immediate effect —on their own minds. It made them completely wretched (see verses 4, 10, &c.). Several thousand men shed tears of bitterness, not from hunger, but because they wish for a particular kind of food and cannot get it! 5. Its *sinfulness.* They had, or professed to have, low thoughts of God's power (v. 4). They made light of God's goodness. They despised God's authority.

II. The conduct of their insulted God towards them in consequence of their sin.

1. He granted their desire. He works a miracle to give them what they wish for. It comes to them like a token of His favour; but what was God doing all this while? Only vindicating His expressed power. We can know nothing of the favour of God towards us by any of the temporal gifts He bestows. This history tells us that God can give in His displeasure as well as in His love. 2. He took vengeance on them in a fearful manner and at a very remarkable time. How eagerly they gathered the quails; they know no weariness (v. 32). If there is an active, laborious creature in God's universe it is a fallen man, when, his heart fixed on some earthly object, he bends himself to attain it. The hidden energy that God gave him at first then comes out, or rather the broken fragments that remain, and excites at once our admiration and our pity. But God often makes our sin our punishment. Sometimes he takes our abundance from us, and other times He acts more fearfully, and takes us from our abundance (Luke xii. 20). The Scriptural account of the matter is:

"When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."—*Charles Bradley.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—God loves to over-deserve of men; and to exceed not only their sins, but their very desires.

Israel desired meat, and received quails. If they had had the coarsest flesh hunger would have made it dainty; but now God will pamper their famine, and give them the meat of kings. How good shall we find Him to those that please Him since He is so gracious to offenders! Howsoever, with us men, the most stubborn sometimes fare the best; the righteous Judge sometimes frames His remunerations as He finds us, and provokes the worst to repentance by His temporal favours.

II.—God's hand is in the motion of His meanest creatures.

Not only we, but they, move in Him. As not many quails, so not one sparrow falls without Him. How much more are the actions of man directed by His providence. How ashamed might these Israelites have been to see these creatures so obedient to their Creator, while they went so repiningly to His service and their own preferment.

III.—The same sin repeated may be death, whose first act found remission.

The first time (Exod. xvi. 13) Israel sped well with their quails, though they murmured (Exod. xvi. 1-3). They did eat and prosper; now they have quails with a vengeance! The meat was pleasant, but the sauce was fearful. Relapses are desperate, where the sickness itself is not. It is a mortal thing to abuse the lenity of God. It is more mercy than He owes us if He forbear us once; it is His justice to plague us the second time. We may thank ourselves if we will not be warned.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—III.

Remark—

I.—The power and dominion of God.

Every living thing stands before Him, and ministers to Him. He says to one, "Go," and he goeth; to another, "Come," and he cometh. He speaks, and they repair to Adam for names, and to Noah for shelter. Has He enemies? Every being, from an angel to a fly, becomes an executioner. Has He friends? He can never want instruments to deliver or relieve them.

II.—Persons may gather and hoard up what they may never live to enjoy.

III.—It is not the refusal, but the gratification, of our desires, that often proves ruinous.—*William Jay.*

MIRIAM SMITTEN WITH LEPROSY.

Transfiguration through transgression.

"*And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle: and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow.*"—Numb. xii. 10.

I.—This transfiguration was brought to pass on account of the jealousy of Miriam of Moses, and the jealousy of God FOR Moses.

"Hath the Lord, indeed, spoken only by Moses?" (verse 2). "Were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (verse 8).

Thoughts that contain the venom of jealousy, when expressed, form the character and pass judgment upon it. "By thy *words* thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xi. 37). Miriam's jealousy of her brother came out in her speech, and her speech brought miraculous judgment upon her. God was jealous of the honour of His servant, and *His* jealousy manifested itself in words of reproof. So a righteous and sinful jealousy led to

this transforming judgment. God's words justified Him, Miriam's condemned her.

II. – The transformation was in keeping with the expressed jealousy of God and of Miriam.

The narrative leads us to think that Miriam's feelings broke forth like sudden fire. While she was "musing, the fire burned," and she spake bitter and angry words. And we are told that the Lord likewise spake suddenly (verse 4) in words of authority and reproof. And the punishment came suddenly. "The cloud departed, and behold Miriam became leprous." So, we are told, shall the "coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. xxiv. 27). The indignation of the Lord was great, the bitter feeling of Miriam was intense, and the disease which was the consequence of both was of the most malignant kind.

LESSONS.

I.—That inequalities of position in the Church of God have their origin in the will of God. Vessels belonging to the same owner vary in the amount of cargo they carry because they vary in their capacity. One is 1,000 tons burthen, another 500, and so on. But why do they differ in tonnage? This must be referred to the will of the owner who built each one. The forest trees are all free to grow, but the willow cannot attain to the dimensions of the oak, or the ash to the strength of the cedar of Lebanon. It has not been given to them to do so. So there are intellectual inequalities among God's servants. "To one he gave five talents, to another two," &c. (Matt. xxv. 15). Why not give to each one the same number? Why does not the shipbuilder build each vessel of the same size, or the Creator make each tree exactly like its fellow? Because they are destined for different service, and this destiny must be referred to the will of their owners. Neither Miriam nor Aaron could grow into a Moses.

II.—That God is, from a *blessed necessity*, a respecter of persons in relation to *character*. Some of God's children com-

mand more affection and respect than others, because they deserve more. We find ourselves under the necessity of esteeming some more highly than others, and God is, so to speak, under the same blessed necessity. He did esteem Moses more highly than He esteemed Aaron or Miriam, and the reason is found, not in his mental superiority, but because he "was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (verse 3).

III.—That the abstract devil of jealousy *within* the church of God, hinders its progress more than a legion of personal devils *without*. "The people journeyed not," &c. (verse 15). When leaders of an army become jealous of each other's reputation, they let loose an enemy which will soon take the wheels off the artillery and hamstring the horses; and the same devil in the Church of God has often made the chariot wheels go heavily.

IV.—The practice and precept of the New Testament were anticipated by some Old Testament saints. The river at its well-head may be narrow, but the water is the same in quality as it is when it flows into the ocean. The channel was not so broad, but the spirit was the same. "Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee (verse 13), anticipates, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts vii. 60); "Father, forgive them" (Luke xxiii. 34); "Pray for them which despitefully use you" (Matt. v. 44).

SELECTED—I.

I.—Deformity is a fit cure for pride.

Since Miriam would acknowledge no difference between herself and Moses, every Israelite shall now see his face glorious, hers leprous. Because the venom of her tongue would have eaten into the reputation of her brother, therefore a poisonous infection eats into her flesh. That Midianite, whom she scorned, was now beautiful compared with her.

II.—Never any opposed the servants of God, but one

time or other they have been constrained to confess a superiority.

Aaron, that so lately made his brother, a fellow in his sad deprecation and prayer to Moses, now makes him his god. "Lay not this sin upon us," &c. (verse 11), as if Moses had sent the plague, and could remove it.

III.—When God desires or defers to grant our requests, it is for our good, and for the good of others. Moses' prayer for Miriam was not at once answered. If the judgment had been at once inflicted and removed, there had been no example of terror to others. There is no policy in the sudden removal of a just punishment; unless the rain so fall that it lie and soak into the earth, it profits nothing.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED II.

Consider the punishment of Miriam as expressing God's displeasure against those—

I.—Who oppose the civil magistrate.

Rulers may so conduct themselves as totally to destroy the compact between them and their subjects, but religious people should, as far as possible, conform to the injunction, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts xxiii. 5).

II.—Who disregard the ministers of the Gospel.

What Moses had done was by the direction and authority of God, and it was at the peril of the greatest people of the land to oppose him. Ministers are ambassadors in Christ's stead (2 Cor. v. 20).

III.—Who neglect the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ is that prophet of whom Moses was a shadow. In reference to Him, therefore, the lesson has tenfold weight.

Note.—The murmurs of Miriam and Aaron were not public; "but the Lord heard them."—*Charles Simeon.*

THE JUDGMENT OF KORAH.

"*And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave that was under them,*" *&c.*—Numb. xvi. 31-33.

I. A reference to the words of Moses recorded in verses 29 and 30, will show that the death of these men was a supernatural event. Moses foretells the exact manner in which it should take place, he calls it "a new thing," he stakes his Divine commission upon it—"Hereby shall ye know that Jehovah has sent me." It was new as the dividing of the Red Sea had been new, or as the standing still of the sun in after days in obedience to the command of Joshua, and was as miraculous as either of those events. God alone could have given such an attestation to the mission of a man; the death of Korah was an emphatic and terrible answer to the charges which had been brought against Moses; and its following so immediately upon his words adds another supernatural element to the event. We may learn from it and from what led to it—

1. That the human character which most approaches perfection, and the most qualified leader of men, may be falsely accused by those to whom he is a blessing. Probably Moses never had a superior either in character or ability, yet to him it was said, "Ye take too much upon you" (verse 3). 2. It must depend upon the *character* and not upon the *number* of the people whether their voice is to be taken as the voice of God. Nearly all Israel, it appears (verse 21), were with Korah and his associates, yet Moses, although almost alone, had God and right on his side. 3. That God will, sooner or later, vindicate those of his servants who have been falsely accused. False charges have rested upon many for *centuries*, and at the end of that time the truth has come to light. There is to be a day which shall "declare" it (1 Cor. iii. 13). "They cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord . . . . and it was said unto them that they should rest for a season," &c.

(Rev. vi. 11). The Son of God lived and died under false accusation, but He was vindicated by His resurrection; and when He shall be revealed from heaven with "ten thousand of His saints" (Jude 14), He will bring to light men's hidden motives and make manifest the counsels of the heart.

SELECTED—I.

I.—Although, in a sense, all men are equal before God, yet God gives to some, place and authority above their fellows.

The whole congregation of Israel were holy in a sense, as being taken into covenant with God; but that which was a national privilege, shared by the meanest Israelite, gave no claim to the magistracy or the priesthood which He had bestowed according to His pleasure.

II.—Punishment may come from most unlooked-for sources.

From the solid earth, so fruitful in blessings, we should least expect the possibility of mischief; yet the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up these transgressors, and has, in later ages, at God's bidding swallowed up whole households.

III.—The marvel is, if we would read our history aright, not that such things happen now and then, but that they are not often repeated.

Why should the blasphemers curse God with the breath He gives? Why should the sot be supplied continually with strength to labour, and the man of substance gather in plenty from his fields, when the fruits of the earth are stored up without any first-fruits being rendered to the Lord of the harvest? —*Adapted from J. H. Gurney*, 1856.

SELECTED—II.

I.—God's vengeance, when it is at the hottest, makes differences in men.

God and Moses could distinguish betwixt the heads of the faction and the brain: "Get you away from about the taberna-

cles of Korah." Ever before common judgment there is a separation. In the universal judgment of all the earth the Judge Himself will separate; in these particular executions we must separate ourselves.

II.—Pride and infidelity hardens the heart and makes cowards fearless.

When these rebels saw all Israel run from them as monsters, they still stand impudently staring at the door of their tent.

III.—All the elements agree to serve the vengeance of their maker.

There were two sorts of traitors; the fire consumed the one, the earth swallowed up the other. The waters did cleave to give way unto Israel for their preservation; the earth did cleave to give way to their conspirators in judgment—both sea and earth did shut their jaws again upon the adversaries of God. This latter element was unused to such morsels. It devours the carcases of men; but bodies informed with living souls, never before.—*Bishop Hall.*

THE BUDDING OF AARON'S ROD.

"*And it came to pass, that on the morrow, Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.*"—Numb. xvii. 8.

Notice—

I.—The threefold significance of the rods which were laid to settle the question in dispute.

1.—They were *historic.* The rods of the tribes were handed down from one generation to another, outliving many generations, and reminding the men of the present of the events of

the past, as the mace of a city in England calls up to our minds events which have been connected with it in the past. 2. They were *representative.* They represented every man of the tribe as a mace represents every citizen, or as the heraldic sign of a noble house represents each member of the house, and the number upon the colour of the regiment represents each soldier in the regiment. 3. The rod was a sign of *personal authority* when borne by the man who alone was entitled to carry it—the head of the tribe. The macebearer derives no authority from bearing the sign of it, but in the hands of the chief magistrate it is an emblem of official power. The coronet in the hands, or even upon the *head*, of a commoner, means nothing; but it means rank upon the brow of him to whom it rightfully belongs.

II.—Aaron's rod represented more remarkable historic events, and signified more authority than the rods belonging to the heads of the other tribes.

It is generally supposed to have been the rod used by him and by Moses in the performance of the miracles of Egypt and the wilderness (compare Exod. vii. 9, 19, &c.). It was, therefore, connected with miracle in the past—it had been alive. And it signified an authority not derived from birth (Exod. vi. 17, 18), but conferred by the special selection of God. The present miraculous manifestation may suggest—

1.—That the creation of life is the highest manifestation of Divine power. Miracles of increase may to some extent find an analogy in the works of man when he works in co-operation with the established laws of nature. He sows a seed and reaps thirtyfold, and so on. But there is life in the seed to work upon. The giving of life to the dead, the inanimate, can in no way be imitated by man. The character of this miracle therefore seems intended—

2.—To vindicate most forcibly the right of God to decide who should be, not only the head of the tribe of Levi, but the

priestly head of the entire nation. The Creator has a right to appoint to His creatures their positions in the world in which He has placed them. He who could thus dispense with all the seasons in the production of the flowers and fruit upon the rod had a right to set aside the ordinary laws of primogeniture. God is not handcuffed by either His natural or social laws. He can break all laws except those of moral rectitude. To violate *them* is His blessed impossibility.

3.—It may further suggest that the choice of God would be justified in the after history of Israel. The choice for special service begins with God. The selection of an earthly ambassador springs, not from himself, but from the king who sends him. So the Saviour and King of men said to His ambassadors, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." But His choice was justified by their "bringing forth fruit which remained" (John xv. 16). So the choice of Aaron's family was justified by the fruit which some members brought forth to bless the nation. Their faith and courage in entering Jordan, the zeal of Phinehas (Numb. xxv. 7), &c., were typified in the budding and fruit-bearing rod which was their symbol.

SELECTED—1

I.—Fruitfulness is the best argument of the calling of God.

Never shall that man have comfort in the ministry, whom God hath not chosen. This rod was the pastoral staff of Aaron, the great shepherd of Israel. God testifies his approbation of his charge by the fruit.

II.—It is the choice of God that makes the distinction in men.

Every name was alike written on their rod; there is no difference in the letters or the wood. These rods were not laid up in the cabinets of their owners, but are laid before the Lord. It is fit God should make choice of His own attendants.

III.—Those monuments God would have continued in His

Church, which carry in them the most manifest evidences of that which they import.

Moses' rod did great miracles, yet I find it not in the ark. The rod of Aaron had this privilege, because it carried the miracle still in itself; whereas the wonders of that other rod were passed.—*Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

The typical reference of the budding of Aaron's rod.

Observe—

I.—*After* the atonement and intercession of Aaron his rod budded. So *after* the atonement and intercession of Christ, the stem of Jesse flourished, and filled the world with fruit. Though separated from the living, the Branch of Deity budded and blossomed and brought forth fruit on the morning of the resurrection.

II.—It typifies that Gospel which is the rod of Messiah's power. 1. When considered in itself and in its effects, it presents an object no less miraculous than the sight of a dry and sapless branch bringing forth blossoms and almonds. There is nothing in the preaching of the cross to charm the carnal mind. 2. Nor less marvellous is the perpetuity of the effects of the Gospel of Christ. The buds, &c., upon Aaron's rod did not wither or fall, but were preserved in the ark during many generations. The existence of the Christian Church during so many ages of persecution is a remarkable evidence of the Lord's power and presence.

III.—There is a correspondence in the change which took place in Aaron's rod, and in the effects produced by the rod of Christ's power. Every Christian is dead by nature, but when the principle of spiritual life is communicated to him he brings forth—1. The *budding* of heartfelt confession. 2. The *blossoms* of the graces of the Spirit. 3. The fruit of *tried principle.*—*Slightly altered from Discourse by Rev. Chas. Neate.*

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

"*And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.*"—Numb. xxi. 9.

Consider—

I.—The occasion of the miracle.

The occasion of the setting of a broken limb is found in the fact that a natural law has been broken; the hedge has been broken through, and a serpent's bite is the result (see Eccles. x. 8), in the shape of a fracture. This is not the *cause* of the limb's being set, but it is the *occasion.* The action of the man and the re-action of the law gives room for the work of the surgeon. The child that falls into the sea furnishes the *occasion* for the swimmer to save him, but not the *cause.* The Hebrews murmured against Moses and against God, they broke the hedge of moral obligation, and in a literal sense were bitten by serpents. Their sin and its consequence became the occasion of God's miraculous interference on their behalf.

II.—The causes of the miracle.

The confession of the people, the prayer of Moses, and mercy of God. Confession is considered indispensable to restoration to human favour; we cannot therefore blame God for allowing man to remain under His displeasure until he confesses himself in the wrong. His condition was complied with in the case before us (verse 7), and led to the prayer of Moses being heard, and a means of recovery being appointed.

III.—The nature of the healing.

It differed from ordinary cases of healing. 1. Because there was nothing in the uplifted serpent itself to cure disease any more than there was in the pole upon which it hung. 2.

Because it appears evident that the cure was instantaneous—he who looked lived.

IV.—The moral teaching of the miracle in the likeness of the serpent to Christ as set forth by Himself, and in its contrast to Christ, which we gather from placing the narrative side by side with New Testament teaching and Christian experience.

1. *The likeness.* The serpent was provided by Divine appointment, and the one condition of healing was set forth by God. The Saviour and the plan of salvation were from God alone—"Eye hath not seen," &c. (1 Cor. ii. 9). The brazen serpent had the *form* but not the *venom* of the fiery serpents. The Saviour had the form of man, but not the *sin*. 2. The *contrast*. There was no *necessity* for the uplifting of the serpent, but there was a moral necessity for the uplifting of the Saviour. There was no *healing power* in the serpent. There is a power of *moral healing* in the Saviour. The *one act* of faith was enough to save the bodily life. He who desires soul-healing must *live a life* of faith upon the Son of God, constantly "*looking unto Jesus*" (Heb. xii. 2).

SELECTED—I.

I.—The brazen serpent was appointed by God.

So God hath "set forth" Christ as a propitiation. The plan of redemption is of Divine contrivance.

II.—The Israelites were bitten by *serpents*, and they were healed by means of a *serpent* of brass.

So it is by means of *Him* who knew no sin being made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" that we are saved from everlasting death.

III.—The serpent of brass was harmless in itself, though it wore the *form* of the reptile that had spread death through the camp of Israel.

So Christ was sinless, although He took the *form* of fallen man.

IV.—When the serpent stung, the Israelite was to experience a *personal* cure.

Unless his eye was fixed upon the hope set before him, he would die within sight of the all-sufficient remedy. So we must look to Jesus that we may live.—*Charles Neate.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—God gave means to as many as were stung, to be healed by looking on a serpent lifted up. So God hath provided how to cure the guilt of sin, by looking on Christ, who bore our sins on the cross.

II.—As the living serpents were charmed by the dead one, *that* they had no power to kill; so sin that lives in us is weakened that it shall not condemn, by the Son of God that died to save us.

III.—As *one* serpent was set up for all Israel, so one Saviour was crucified for the sins of the world. The hope of remedy is founded in unity. Israel had not distinct serpents erected according to the number of their tribes. Our Redeemers are not many: they that have divers saviours have never a Saviour. As our wound is *one* in *all*, so *one* Jesus is rich in mercy to all. —*Bishop Hackett*, 1660.

BALAAM'S ASS.

"*And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee,*" *etc.*—Numb. xxii. 28-30.

Observe—

I.—The historic character of the miracle here recorded.

In the history of Christ and in that of His apostles incidents are recorded which are miraculous, side by side with those

which are not miraculous. The one cannot be separated from the other; they are interwoven into one narrative which must be accepted as a whole or rejected altogether. So it is in the history of Balaam. It is well to note, concerning this incident, that it is spoken of by a New Testament writer as an undoubted fact (2 Pet. ii. 16).

II.—The miracle itself.

The speech of the ass as the instrument of a higher intelligence finds an analogy in another Scriptural record. In the first temptation of man, the speech of the serpent was used to convey the thought of a higher and more intelligent creature. If God permitted Satan to use a serpent to tempt man, why should He not Himself use an ass to reprove man? If the tongue of the serpent was used to convey intelligible sounds, why should not that of any other animal be used for the same purpose? In one case the miracle was wrought by Satan for an evil end, in the other by God for a good end. We have another somewhat analogous case in the speech of parrots and other birds, who utter intelligible sentences without understanding them, the difference being that the ass did at once, and therefore miraculously, what these creatures learn to do by imitation. It is evident that these birds possess a special God-given faculty to imitate human words, and He who made them made the ass also.

III.—The object of the miracle.

It was to bring Balaam to obey the Divine voice of his conscience, which was well nigh drowned in the clamour of his covetousness for the wages of unrighteousness. 1. It was calculated to humble him in relation to a gift of God upon which he probably prided himself. It is likely he was an eloquent man. He would now see that God could endow a brute with the gift of speech. 2. He would also see that an ass could discern a messenger from heaven where he, blinded by his desire for gain, could see nothing but empty space.

3. He might also have learned that all speech was under Divine control, and that he would be able to utter only such words as God would permit.

LESSONS.

I.—That the means used by God to bring men to obedience are always adapted to that end, although they do not always attain it. Balaam needed to repent of his present course, and nothing could have been more likely to startle him into reflection upon it than a reproof from his own beast. He had a moment's space for consideration before he stood face to face with the angel of the Lord, but his half-hearted confession of his sin (verse 34) shows—

II.—That, when obedience to a certain command is withheld (verse 12), miracles are powerless to change character. Those who were unwilling to take the yoke of Christ (Matt. xi. 29), were not won by His miracles (see also Luke xvi. 31). Miracles startle the soul, but obedience transforms the character.

SELECTED—I.

I. God is often pleased to use the most common and despised instruments to manifest his will.

We think that what is proverbially ridiculous with us must necessarily appear absurd in the eye of God. Yet He, who is no respecter of persons, makes as little difference among animals. He caters alike for the sparrow and the eagle. All animals are created in equal wisdom, and our contempt is ignorance. The giving of articulation to a brute is no more to God than the making the blind see or the deaf hear.

II. There was a peculiar fitness in the instrument employed in this miracle.

Granted the reputed baseness of the animal, it proves the truth of Paul's declaration, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," &c. (1 Cor. i. 27). The more vile the means, the fitter to confound the magician.

In Balaam, witchcraft went hand in hand with rebellion; and iniquity and idolatry were concomitants of his perverseness. And so, whereas he was esteemed among his people as an infallible oracle, utterance was given to the dull beast which carried him, which rendered him superior to any oracle, and was eminently calculated to humble his master's pride. Balaam moreover seems to have been of a most obdurate and obstinate disposition. Hence it pleased God to rebuke him by an object the most like himself. We need no more wonder that God employed a contemptible animal to perform His will, than that He should employ Balaam himself; for the prophet, in the eye of heaven, must have appeared more abject than any beast, since nothing is so vile as reason abused and knowledge perverted.—*Jacob Bryant.*

SELECTED—II.

Balaam's religion was united with idolatry and his conduct was governed by covetousness; and we may therefore be assured that when the Lord opened the mouth of the ass to reprove the madness of the prophet, the miracle took place to reprove those two proofs of madness.

I. The dumb ass was the fittest channel by which God would reprove the idolatry of Balaam.

Among the animals of the desert with which Balaam and the people about him were well acquainted, there was no animal so useful, and therefore so much valued, as the wild ass. Consequently they regarded it among the gods of their idolatry. It was as if a voice came from the God of Israel, saying, "Wilt thou join thyself, for the sake of money, to the vain idolatry of the people around you? I will compel the lowest and most stupid of their idols to utter words of reproach to thee."

II. It was the fittest channel for the reproof of the *covetousness* of Balaam.

The wild ass of the East was not the same sort of animal as

that among us. It was selected, because of its size and beauty, to be the bearer of kings and princes, and its use may be said, therefore, to be confined to the wealthy (see Judges v. 10). Now, the only palliation that can be alleged for the love of money, is the poverty which fears want, but the mere fact of Balaam's possessing the animal which was ridden only by the great and wealthy, proves that he had no excuse for the covetousness which loved the wages of unrighteousness. When therefore the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, it was as if it said, "Is not the possession of the dumb ass on which you ride, a proof that you already possess all that human avarice is wont to covet?" God has rebuked that one chief, yet most dangerous of all vices, by the most peculiar and striking miracle recorded in Holy Writ. A most common sin was reproved by most uncommon means.—*Canon Townsend.*

THE DIVIDING OF THE JORDAN.

"*And it came to pass as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth his banks all the time of harvest), that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap,*" *etc.*—Joshua iii. 15–17.

The waters of the Jordan divided—

I.—To fulfil a promise given.

As the dividing of the Red Sea was the seal of Moses' commission as Israel's leader through the wilderness, so the dividing of the Jordan sealed that of Joshua as their leader into Canaan. The living God had promised so to magnify him in the sight of the people that no room should be left to doubt that God had chosen him to be their captain (verses 7, 8). This miracle was the means of doing so. Then Jehovah had promised to

the nation that "without fail" He would drive out the Canaanites before them (verse 10), and the driving back of the Jordan was a sign or pledge of the fulfilment of that promise also.

II.—By means of a presence manifested.

The river rolled back when the feet of the priests bearing the ark touched the waters. The ark was now to be the visible sign of the Divine Presence, as the pillar of cloud and fire had hitherto been. Some *men* have much more power over nature than others. Animals will obey some far more readily than others; and the forces of nature are more under the control of those who have some acquaintance with her secrets than they are under the ignorant. Christ, the ideal man and the Son of God, had perfect mastery over earth and sea, because His knowledge concerning all created things is the knowledge of Him who created them. So "the sea saw and fled;" "Jordan was driven back" (Ps. cxiv. 3), while the token of its Creator's presence was in its midst. We have sometimes, in our streets, seen the stream of ordinary traffic suspended, for a time, to give way to the passing by of the sovereign and her attendants. The people are crowded together in masses on each side of the way, waiting respectfully until their sovereign has passed by. Then the crowds disperse, each man resumes his onward way, and the stream flows on in its wonted course. So it was when Jordan's king came, by the ark of His presence, to the waters. "The water stood on an heap," while the ark stood in its bed, and when the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, the waters returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before (ch. iv. 18). Nature had acknowledged her Master and King, and had given way for the passage of His chosen people.

LESSONS.

I.—Obedience to the Divine precept is the test of true churchhood as it is of true childhood.

II.—The true church of God will never want evidences of His presence. The cloud which guided Israel through the Red Sea was gone, but the ark took its place. The ark and the temple are gone, but the living Lord still manifests Himself (John xiv. 21; Matt. xxviii. 20).

III.—In proportion to our position in God's church is our need of a living faith. The priests were the first to enter Jordan, and the last to leave it. Leaders of armies need more courage than their followers; leaders of God's people need more than ordinary Christians; and courage is the child of faith.

SELECTED—I.

The passage of the Jordan may be regarded—

I.—As a subject for moral and religious reflection.

1. Hitherto the marches of Israel had been conducted by the pillar of cloud and fire. They were now to follow another guide—the *ark*. Difficulties exist in the Christian life, like those of the Israelites, when they stood by the swollen river. Then follow the ark of God; His written Word and unerring Spirit will give you a right judgment, and lead you to a right decision in all things. 2. Again, Israel was to follow the symbol of God's power at a suitable distance. If they had crowded round the ark, their very nearness would have concealed it, and thus defeated its office of guiding their march. As he who affects to look upon the sun with a steadfast eye will be dazzled with its excessive effulgence, and be unable to see his way, so will the eyes of that man be darkened who endeavours to be wise above what is written, and to fathom the depths of an incomprehensible God with the scanty line of his own reason. 3. The season at which Israel crossed the Jordan was the time at which it overflowed its banks. Yet no sooner did the feet of the priests touch the water, than they were divided. So the circumstances of most hopeless difficulty in which God's servants often find themselves, are sent that the

interference of the Most High may be most effectually exhibited in their deliverance.

II.—As a subject of emblematical reference.

It fitly illustrates the walk of a Christian through the stream which separates time from eternity. Death is a way which no man has yet gone, even as the path through Jordan had been hitherto untrodden. But as they would feel it less dreadful, when they followed the ark, so the Christian may walk fearlessly through the valley of death if God be with him.—*From Buddicom's Christian Exodus.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—Mark what respect God doth require to be given unto the testimonies of His presence.

The Levites may only touch the bars of the ark, the Israelites may not approach it nearer than a thousand paces. It is dangerous to be too bold with the ordinances of God. As we say of the court, and of fire, so we may say of Divine institutions—we freeze if we be far off from them; if we be nearer than befits us, we burn.

II.—God would have every one his own witness of His presence and favour.

It was not only for reverence that the ark must be waited on afar, but that each Israelite might see it for himself.

III.—A holiness is required to make us either recipients or beholders of the great works of God.

Ere God will work a miracle before Israel, they must be sanctified. How much more when we would be *actors* in His service.

IV.—How glorious a God do we serve, to whom all the elements are so willingly subject, and gladly take that nature which He pleases to give.

Every strong frost congeals the water in a natural form, but

for the river to stand still and to be made a liquid wall for the passage of troops, is for nature to run out of itself to do homage to the Creator.

V.—Hindrances beset us to the very last in our passage to the promised land. But the same hand that hath made the way hard, hath made the way sure; He that made the wilderness comfortable, will make Jordan dry.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

THE OVERTHROW OF JERICHO.

"*And it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.*"—Josh. vi. 20.

Notice—

I.—That God announces His purpose as accomplished before the means are set in motion which are to accomplish it.

Before the city was compassed by Israel, "the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I *have given* into thine hand Jericho" (verse 2). Men sometimes announce their purposes beforehand, and the means which they intend to employ, but they cannot speak of the purpose as accomplished until the thing is done. The most skilfully planned battle has been lost through the death of an aide-de-camp, or the breaking of a telegraph wire; men may lay plans but they cannot ensure the success of the means. It is the province of God alone to speak of that which He wills to do as already done. No human general can say of a city which he is about to invest, "I have given it."

II.—That, although God announces His purpose as ac-

complished, He includes the use of means by man to accomplish it.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days" (Heb. xi. 30). God included the faith and the obedience springing from it when He spoke of the city as taken. When a general makes a plan for his army he includes in it the living faith of his soldiers. He expects that their confidence in him will be shown by their obedience. He looks for a faith with works (Jas. ii. 14-20), which is a living faith. Joshua and the Israelitish nation showed their living active faith in God by the use of the prescribed means.

Lessons.

I.—God, as the absolute ruler of the universe, claims an absolute right to do what He sees best for mankind in the way which He chooses. A surgeon is allowed to do what he thinks best for a human body. When a limb is incurably diseased, he is permitted to cut it off if he thinks it best to do so. Human rulers are allowed to cut off members of the body politic, when their connection with it has become injurious. Races of men sometimes become so morally diseased that their cure is hopeless, and God claims His right to remove them from the earth when their remaining upon it would be injurious to their fellow-men.

II.—That which the sinner trusts in as a means of security may be his destruction. The men of Jericho, doubtless, looked to their walls as a means of defence, and they became instrumental in their destruction. They prevented their escape before the final catastrophe; they must have crushed many in their fall, and they formed a pavement upon which their conquerors could enter their city. Haman looked to his gallows to rid himself of an enemy, and was hanged thereon himself (Esther vii.). So with the Jews and the cross of Christ.

III.—Faith in the living God, will, as it spreads, lessen the

[illegible] Jonah's prayer was heard by the Lord of one of the members [illegible] Jonah had the same opportunity of receiving the true God by the mouth of a heathen [illegible]. A like submission on the part of the rest of the heathen would have rendered their destruction impossible.

LESSONS.

The lessons by which Jonah was [illegible] were—

I.—Those which God had appointed.

Nineveh was left to their own [illegible] or ignorance. They were to be like sheep [illegible]. They were not even to speak till God commanded them. The men were treated like so many [illegible]. And so does God treat all His children [illegible]. Our real wisdom is to be mindful of our ignorance.

II.—Those which seemed the most likely to succeed.

There seemed no reasonable [illegible] the means and the end. How the ministers of [illegible] must have wondered and have doubted! But in one of the characters of some of God's proceedings in our world. A gardener and a few poor fishermen planted the gospel. A manufacturer's [illegible] salvation for men.

Learn hence—

I.—A simplicity of obedience.

II.—A simplicity of faith.

III.—The importance of a persons walking on God.—Charles Bradley.

CONCLUSION.

I.—The greatness of Jonah's spiritual work—the world's unconscious [illegible] of His chief agency.

The means used were effectual because His will used them to fulfil His promise. Where God was, there was victory.

II.—The way which the possession of Canaan presented was

only be obtained by a similar reception of God's promise and performance of His will.

If the promise of Christ is first received, and His will obeyed, then can be subjugated that enmity against God, which, like the frontier city of guilty Canaan, blocketh up the way to heavenly rest.

III.—Though the preaching of the cross may seem as foolish to the worldling as the march of Israel did to the men of Jericho, and though the result may be delayed, final victory is certain.

Triumph waited on the ark of God's covenant, and, in the ark of Christ's church militant is lodged the promise of triumph more glorious still (Rev. iii. 21).—*Anderson's "Cloud of Witnesses."*

GIDEON'S SACRIFICE CONSUMED BY FIRE.

"*Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes.*"—Judges vi. 21.

Notice—

I.—The end for which this miracle was wrought.

1. An angelic messenger had just made a *declaration* to Gideon amid circumstances, and in a place, which seemed directly to contradict it. "The Lord is with thee," said the angel; but it seemed to Gideon that the very fact that he was obliged to thresh wheat in a wine-press declared that God was against him, and he modestly suggests that the one seems to contradict the other. 2. The angel (or the Lord, verse 14) had given Gideon a *command*, "Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel," and his position and surroundings seemed to render the fulfilment of such a command impossible. "Wherewith

shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house (verse 15). The command and his condition seemed directly opposed to each other. The declaration and command of the angel could only be reconciled by past events in the history of his nation being repeated in the present. Gideon looks back to the days of old. "Where be all the miracles which our fathers told us of?" (verse 13). He begs for some such manifestation now. "Show *me* a *sign*" (verse 17). The angel acknowledges his sympathy with the perplexed man and consents to his petition. "I will tarry until thou come again." Gideon obeys the angelic command (verse 20), a sign is given to him, he came to know that the Lord had indeed appeared to him (verses 22 and 23), and was thus encouraged to take the first step towards the accomplishment of the work which God had given him to do.

II.—The nature and teaching of the miracle.

The fire was miraculously kindled because it rose up out of the rock at the gentle touch of the angel's staff. It might have recalled to Gideon's mind that which "his fathers had told him of," how Moses had touched the rock and an opposite element had issued from it. The fire thus kindled, transformed Gideon's present to the angel into a sacrifice to God. It told him that the person with whom he had been conversing had come from those regions where the sons of God do not live by bread like that which sustains the human frame. It would remind him of the covenant made with the father of his people when a "burning lamp" passed between the sacrifice (Gen. xv. 17), and of the day on which the sacrifice for the sin of the whole nation was shown to be accepted by the same token (Lev. ix. 24). It would thus assure him of God's remembrance of His former mercies and cause him to feel that he was regarded by God as a true son of Abraham, His *friend* (Isa. xli. 8).

III.—The moral effect of the miracle upon Gideon.

"Alas! I have seen the Lord," etc. The nearer perfection

approaches to imperfection, the more deeply does the latter feel the immense difference which separates them. The more the young artist comes to appreciate the excellences of his master's pictures, the more does the sense of his own imperfection grow upon him. This is emphatically the case in relation to moral excellence. Those who live under the influence of men who are much better than themselves must be humiliated by a sense of their own deficiency, if they have any conscience within them. The first pupils of our Lord must have experienced this sense of distance more and more as His perfect character opened itself to them, and the feeling which prompted Peter's first prayer (Luke v. 8) must have often been strong upon them. Without this feeling of their own unworthiness, they would have been lacking in the first element of character needed to perform their great work (Eph. iii. 8). So it was with Gideon here. His doubts were removed, courage was revived, and, by the same divine manifestation, his humility was deepened, and thus the God-elected man was morally fitted for his mission. The Divine assurance given to him, "Peace be unto thee," etc., gives proof that the Lord was satisfied with the result produced. Sometimes physical pain is a sign of returning life; moral pain from consciousness of guilt and weakness is one of the surest indications of spiritual life, and hence of fitness for spiritual work. As Peter's confession of sinfulness (Luke v. 8) was followed by Christ's "Fear not, henceforth thou shalt catch men," so Gideon's expression of a kindred feeling was met with a "Fear not, thou shalt not die."

Lessons.

I.—However long true greatness may be hidden, the time will come when it will be brought to light and fulfil its destiny. The weight of a mountain may be upon a little well of living water, but in one direction or another it will force its way to the surface and become an instrument of refreshing to the inhabitants of the region in which it springs. There may be exceptions to the natural rule, but it is a law of God's moral

kingdom that those who are especially gifted to bless the world, however obscure or unknown, will force their way through every obstacle to their appointed destiny. Luther may sing for bread in the streets of Eisenach, but he will, notwithstanding, stand one day before kings at Worms, and be the Reformer of Germany. Gideon was the youngest member of a comparatively poor and of an idolatrous family, yet, possessing the elements of real greatness of character, he became the deliverer and the judge of Israel.

II.—God looks at the present attainments of men through their future, and sees the development of greatness in the hidden germ. The husbandman sees his harvest in the green blade just bursting from the earth. He brings the future into the present, and looks at the full ear which will be through the promise of it which is now before him. Even in a basket of seed-corn he can discern a hidden power and life which only needs time and circumstances to make itself manifest. And he values it not for what *it is*, but for what it *may become*. The schoolmaster looks at his pupil in the light of what he will be when he is a man. Seeing the talent, ability, and worth now only imperfectly developed, he is content to wait until years have passed for the result of his present labour. So is it with the Great Husbandman, the Perfect Teacher. The Son of God thus regarded His early apostles. He saw the future *rock-like* Peter in the present Simon (John ii. 42), even as the Lord here saw the "mighty man of valour" in the poor thresher in the wine-press at Ophrah. And so He regards all His children in the light of what they shall be (1 John iii. 2). He is willing to wait for the "manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19).

SELECTED.

Observe—

I.—That God takes pleasure in the endeavours of His servants to show their gratitude to Him.

The angel did not need Gideon's offering, yet he waits to

accept it, and that which Gideon intended for a dinner he turns into a sacrifice. But the angel which appeared to Gideon was evidently the Angel of the Covenant (see verses 12 to 16). He whose meat and drink was to do the Father's will calls for the broth and flesh to be poured out upon the stone, and consumes it with fire and departs.

II.—The significance of the miracle.

Gideon, when he reflected upon this wonder, must needs think: "He that can raise fire out of a stone can raise courage and power out of my dead breast. He that by this fire hath consumed the broth and the flesh can, by the feeble flame of my fortitude, consume Midian."—*Bishop Hall.*

The likeness of the visit of the angel to Gideon to that paid to Abraham (Gen. xviii).

1. He appeared in human form. 2. Came as a traveller. 3. Allows food to be placed before him.

Difference: Abraham's visitors "did eat" (Gen. xviii. 8). Here the angel accepted, but did not eat.

The reason of the difference: The visit to Abraham was to seal a friendship already made by covenant. Here it was made to confirm the truth of that covenant, and to enter into a new and personal one with Gideon himself, thereby indicating that God would be with him as the God of his fathers. The acceptance by fire indicated that the Lord would accept Israel if they would forsake Baal.—*Kiel.*

THE SUN AND MOON STAND STILL.

"*Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and He said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon,*" *etc.*—Josh. x. 12.

Observe—

I.—That it is not more remarkable that the bodies which God has set for signs in the heavens should obey Him

to do man service than that any other creature should obey Him for the same purpose.

The sun and moon were created for man's use, were given to him for signs and for seasons (Gen. i. 14), to be dividers of his time, and to give light to a *greaterlight*—to *man*, created in the image of God. There is nothing remarkable that they should be used in any way for the service of man. Man is almost infinitely superior to the sun. When David said, "What is man in comparison with the heavens?" (Ps. viii.), he most likely referred to him as a mere mortal. If he did not, his reflections fall into the shade beside the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark viii. 36).

II.—That it is not to be wondered at that the heavenly bodies, in common with other creatures, should serve some men in a different way from others.

God is the Master of the candles that He has lighted, and we need not be surprised if He should hold them in a certain position for a certain time to serve the purpose of those men whose lives are most in accord with His will, which is their good.

III.—Especially it is not surprising that God should have retained the noon-day light to execute His own purposes.

God had before broken in upon the ordinary course of nature. "The fountains of the great deep had broken up" at the deluge; fire had rained from heaven upon Sodom and her sister cities; and if we believe the words of Christ and His apostles, not all the terrors of the flood and the rain of fire combined will bear comparison with the tremendous realities which shall break upon the world when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels (2 Thess. i. 7; Matt. xxiv. 30, 31).

LESSONS.

I.—Material blessings serve God in a higher region when they are used to attain moral ends. The fig-tree mentioned in

Mark xi. came into a higher service when it was smitten by Christ than it would have stood in if it had merely produced figs for ages. It was promoted into a moral teacher, and so became a co-worker with God. The bread and wine used in the Lord's supper are raised to a higher platform than that which bread and wine ordinarily occupies, because they then speak to that part of man which does not live by material bread. The sun and moon had not hitherto been called to this honour, but now these signs, which had in the past been merely physical blessings, were put to a higher use.

II.—Material blessings which are the common property of all men become the special servants of those who live a life of faith upon the Giver. The servant of God uses His common gifts to sustain a life in which he may form a character for the society of His Master. Therefore he has a higher claim to the service of the world of matter around him. Therefore "all things are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 21). Joshua had a common interest in the physical blessings of the sunlight, but, as one on the side of Jehovah against idolators, he could enlist its help for the attainment of moral ends.

Note.—For criticism and discussion on this miracle see *Hulsean Lectures for* 1853-54 *by Rev. M. Cowie; Lange's Commentary, etc.*

SELECTED—I.

I.—The *request* of a faithful man *commands.*

It was not Joshua, but his faith that did this; not by way of precept, but by prayer. "Then spake Joshua to the Lord" etc. (verse 12). What is there that God cannot do? What is there which God can do that faith cannot do?

II.—God's glory was what Joshua aimed at.

Had he respected but the slaughter of the Amorites, he knew the hailstones would do that alone; but he desired that it might be known that the sun and moon, their gods, were servants to the God whom they should serve.—*Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

Notice—

I.—That this miracle was wrought to humble a defiance of the power of God more daring than any that had yet been manifested in the land of Canaan. The kings of the Amorites disputed the supremacy of God in the face of the proofs given at Jericho and at Ai. We can therefore see how befitting it was that God should so visibly interpose.

II.—That it was directed against one of the most strongly-rooted forms of idolatry practised in Canaan. It is generally supposed that the worship of the sun and moon and stars was the first form which idolatry assumed, and we may therefore suppose it was the one most difficult to eradicate. By no conceivable miracle could the inhabitants of Canaan have been taught their folly in this matter so impressively as in that in which the very gods in whom they confided stood still and left them to perish.

LESSONS.

I.—God still continues to deal so with men when they place their trust in any object below Himself. He shows them how little they can do in the time of trial or how they may be turned into a source of suffering.

II.—This remarkable display of Divine power intimates that the cause in which Israel was engaged was one in which the world at large was concerned, and that the interests immediately involved were inseparably linked to another, to the advancement of which everything else would be rendered subservient. —*Adapted from Dr. Gordon's Christ as made known to the Ancient Church.*

GIDEON'S FLEECE.

"And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by my hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor," etc.—Judges vi. 36-40.

Notice—

I.—That the means which Gideon used to assure himself of the Divine help were suggested from the occupation of his life.

The actions and words of men are naturally coloured by their callings. When the centurion spoke to Christ of His power over disease, he used a similitude drawn from his own military experience, and suggested that as his servant had often felt the force of *his* will, so his servant's disease might now feel the force of Christ's (Luke vii. 8). Gideon had often looked upon the dew as it lay sparkling upon his father's fields; it was a familiar object to him; hence his choice of it as a medium of communication between himself and God.

II.—That the sign was miraculous, inasmuch as it was given in answer to prayer.

The dews of night are, like the new birth, "not of the will of man, but of God." If Gideon had them to wait upon him, to fall where he pleased, and to fall nowhere else in his field, then God must have given a special edict to them to cheer the heart of the "mighty man of valour" for the coming conflict.

III.—That although the first sign was miraculous, it failed to satisfy Gideon.

We can understand this. Christian men are sometimes visited, often in answer to prayer, by some special providence which, at the moment, they feel is a direct interposition in their favour. But how soon after suggestions enter the mind that, after all, what has happened can be explained by the laws of ordinary providence. After the first miracle, Gideon was

troubled with the thought that the fleece might have held the dew longer than the ground around it, simply by the action of a natural law. Hence his second petition, that the miracle might be proved by a second, which was more markedly supernatural.

IV.—The end of the miracle thus wrought.

It was twofold: First, to convince a patriot that he would be equal to the work to which he had been called; and, Secondly, to assure him that God had not forsaken the nation which He had delivered from Egyptian bondage. When a startling and original act is performed by any human hand which is not contrary to reason or conscience, if it is performed for a good end, and attains that end, we praise the wisdom and goodness of the originator. Here the means were uncommon and somewhat startling, but they are reasonable and moral, and they fully attained the end desired; therefore God is to be praised for thus condescending to the weakness of his sincere servant.

LESSONS.

I.—The laws of nature are not independent in their action. The laws which produce the dew were compelled in this case to turn aside from their wonted path and to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

II.—Those who dread lest the Divine anger should visit them because they ask for tokens of Divine guidance, will never feel the wrath which they fear. God was not afraid that His character would suffer in the hands of a man who was so fearful of offending Him (verse 39). Could a parent be displeased with a child whose only desire was to know certainly his father's will?

III.—Great reverence for God is always a feature in characters of exalted goodness (Gen. xviii. 27; Dan. ix. 3).

SELECTED—I.

The sign was—

I. Truly miraculous and therefore abundantly confirmatory.

It is said of the dew that it is from the Lord, and "tarrieth not for man," etc. (Micah. v. 7); and yet here God hearkened to the voice of a man in directing it, by which it appears that it falleth not by chance, but by providence. It was wrought backward and forward to please Gideon; thence Dr. Fuller observes that "Heaven's miracles will endure turning, being inside and outside both alike."

II.—Very significant.

Gideon and his men were going to engage the Midianites; could God distinguish between the small fleece of Israel and the vast floor of Midian? Yes, by this he is made to know that He can. Is Gideon desirous that the dew of Divine grace shall descend upon himself in particular? He sees the fleece wet with dew to assure him of it. Doth he desire that God would be as the dew to all Israel? Behold, the ground is wet.

LESSONS.

See how tender God is of true believers, and how ready to condescend to their infirmities. He suffers Himself not only to be prevailed upon by their importunities, but even to be prescribed to by their doubts.

SELECTED—II.

In this circumstance we see displayed—

I.—The weakness of man.

Gideon could not give full credit to the word of God. A sign had been given him, similar to that which had been given at the consecration of Aaron to the priestly office (Lev. ix. 24). Yet still he wanted fresh signs to convince him that God would indeed fulfil His word. Do we not see in this the weakness of all mankind? (Gen. xii. 12, 13; Exod. iv. 1-9; Psa. lxxvii. 7-10; Mark iv. 38).

II.—The condescension of God.

A fellow-creature who had given such solemn promises would have been indignant at finding his veracity called in question. How offensive the request, "If thou wilt *do as thou hast said.*" And even when God acceded to his first request, he must "prove" Him again before he can believe that He "*will do as He has said.*" We behold a similar instance of condescension on the part of the Saviour in His dealing with Thomas. We may expect the same condescension. With the same desire to satisfy our minds, "He has confirmed His covenant with an oath, that by two immutable things," &c. (Heb. vi. 17, 18). Mark the repetitions in the promises (Isa. xli. 10, 14, 16; xlix. 24, 25).

III.—The efficacy of prayer.

Gideon, with much humility, besought the Lord. No man can conceive to what an extent God will magnify His condescension and grace towards a humble supplicant until He has put him to the test (Jas. v. 16-18).—*Charles Simeon.*

SAMSON'S VICTORY WITH THE JAWBONE, ETC.

"*And he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. . . . . And he was sore athirst, but God clave an hollow place,*" etc.—Judges xv. 15, 18, 19.

Notice—

I.—The occasion of the miracle.

It is found in the utter degeneracy of Samson's countrymen. They were in bondage to the Philistines (chapter xiv. 4), and they were *willing* to be so. More than this, they were indignant against the only man in the nation who was able and willing to free them, and so utterly were they devoid of any

spark of patriotism that they actually planned to deliver him up to his and their enemies (verse 12). God had raised Samson up to be their leader back to freedom, but they preferred the yoke of the idolator to that of the Living God. Out of his unwillingness that either he or they should be thus enslaved sprang the remarkable act here recorded.

II. That this victory was wrought by supernatural strength.

The human mind has no power in itself to foretell future events; if it does make known what is to come to pass beforehand, we refer this power, which does not belong to men naturally, to a superhuman interposition. In like manner, no man could have done what Samson did by the strength which ordinarily belongs to man; in the first place, the weapon was entirely unadapted to smite men clad in armour, as the Philistines doubtless were; and in the second, the number slain exceeds all that it would be possible for the mightiest warrior to kill in a single day with the most effective weapon. No Damascus blade of Saracen, or axe of Cœur de Lion, ever scored a thousand lives in one battle. Hence it must be placed among the miraculous acts wrought by men as instruments of supernatural power. Moreover the inspired historian directly traces it to the special inspiration of the Spirit of God (verse 14).

III.—That supernatural help given to perform a special act does not lift a man, in his ordinary life, into the region of the supernatural.

Samson slew a thousand men with a jawbone, but he was afterwards likely to die of thirst himself. Paul was once caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. xii. 2), but he was not exempted from bodily infirmities afterwards (verse 10).

From the whole history we may learn—

I.—That there is need of some nobleness of nature in one's self to enable one to appreciate it in another. There must be light in the *eye* to *see* it in the sun. There must be an ear for

music before we can discern the musical gifts of others. It needed a Jonathan to understand a David. These men of Judah could not sympathise with Samson, because all the manhood was gone out of the tribe who had once numbered in its ranks such a man as Caleb, the son of Jephunneh (Numb. xiii. 6; Josh. xiv. 12).

II.—Conflict is always to be preferred to tame submission to bondage, whether bodily or spiritual, individual or national. God and all the good are with those who wrestle for liberty (Eph. vi. 10-16).

III.—Although special signs of God's favour do not exempt men from the ordinary needs and sufferings of life, they may bring the past help as a plea in present need (verse 18). "Lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. xii. 7) perhaps explains why those who have been highly honoured by extraordinary tokens of God's favour are brought down to the level of ordinary men by some commonplace want.

THE FALL OF DAGON.

"*And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth,*" *etc.*—1 Sam. v. 3-5.

I.—God works in silence and in secret against false systems of religion to give men a public and sudden proof of their folly.

Dagon's downfall took place in the secrecy of the night; when daylight came his destruction was made apparent. God's kingdoms of nature and of grace come not "with observation" (Luke xvii. 20). All the winter secret preparation is being made for the outburst of spring. So God worked in men's

souls before the downfall of Paganism before Christianity, before the downfall of priestcraft at the Reformation.

II.—The heathen may learn a better way through the medium of their own delusions.

Experience of the fallacy of the advice of a quack is the surest way to lead men to put faith in a skilful physician. "If the Philistines had not been senseless, they would have been taught by the first fall of Dagon, his miserable impotency" *(Bishop Hall)*.

III.—Even miraculous evidence does not always suffice to bring men to acknowledge God.

Dagon testified by his first fall that "an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. viii. 4). But the Philistines set him up again. His fall upon the threshold seemed to tell them that he was only fit to be *trodden under foot*, yet they venerated even the spot upon which he fell. Israel, as a nation, was formed and sustained by miracle for forty years, and were delivered by miracle over and over again, yet God's testimony concerning them is, "Ephraim is joined unto idols (Hosea iv. 17). A delusion *proved* is not a delusion *abandoned*. Why? Because "men *love* darkness rather than light, because their *deeds* are evil" (John iii. 19).

IV.—When delusions which reveal themselves are not forsaken God gives men over to their delusions.

The verdict is "let him alone" (Hosea iv. 17). See also Romans i. 24; 2 Thess. ii. 12.

SELECTED.

Dagon before the ark; or, Heathenism conquered at the feet of the living God—

1. In the domain of its power, its own abode (verses 1, 2). 2. Through the secret demonstration of the power of the Lord (verses 3, 4). 3. Amid the destruction of its power and glory (the *face*, as a sign of its worthless glory and vain beauty, struck

down to the earth; the *head*, also, as the seat of the wisdom which is alienated from God and opposed to God; the *hands*, as a symbol of the powers of darkness which work therein, cut off) (verses 3–5).

The fall of heathenism. 1. It is *thrown down* before the power of God, manifesting Himself as present in His *word* (the law and testimony in the ark). 2. Its power *broken* and *destroyed* through the secretly working power of the Spirit of God. 3. Ever a more and more glorious *revelation* of the power of God which casts down heathenism in the light of the day of salvation.—*Lange's Commentary.* Where God comes with His ark and His testimony, there He smites the idols to the ground; idolatry must fall, where His gospel finds a place.—*Berlenb. Bible.*

THUNDER AND RAIN AT THE PRAYER OF SAMUEL.

"*Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes,*" *etc.*—1 Samuel xii. 16, 19.

I.—That this incident was a miracle is evident—

1. Because the rain and thunder came in obedience to the will of man. The elements are exclusively under the control of the Creator, and He alone can say what shall be in relation to the clouds; yet for special ends—generally moral ends—they have occasionally been placed, for a season, at the service of men. This instance is a parallel to that which occurred in Egypt (Exod. ix. 23). It is to be remarked that Samuel spoke confidently as to the issue of his prayer, "The Lord *shall* send," etc. Our prayers are conditioned with "May be," or "May it please the Lord;" but this is not the form here used by the prophet. He rises to the same confidence as Moses expressed when he said, "I will spread abroad my hands unto the Lord, and the thunder *shall* cease." 2. Because the

thunder and rain came at a season of the year in which, in the natural course of things, they are never heard or seen in Canaan. "Is it not wheat harvest to-day?" The time of harvest in this country is often a time of much thunder and rain, but this is not the case in the land where this miracle was wrought. 3. The effect of the storm upon the minds of those who witnessed it was such as to make it evident that they regarded it as a supernatural manifestation. They regarded it as sent to confirm the reproof which they had just received from Samuel. Here we are again reminded of the words of Pharaoh when God, by Moses, sent a similar, though probably a much more severe visitation upon him and his people (Exod. ix. 27, 28).

II.—The intention of the miracle.

It was sent as an attestation of the blamelessness of Samuel's administration as judge of Israel. When a person who has held an office of trust is about to resign it, whether to a single master or to his country, it is natural to review the past, and most seemly that those whom he has served should express their approbation of his services if those services have been faithfully performed. The more public the post which he has held the more publicly the approbation will probably be expressed. Samuel has here himself reviewed his own administration, and the thunder and rain which came at his call was God's Amen to the declaration of the justice and wisdom of His servant's rule. It was at the same time a token of God's displeasure at Israel's present wilfulness. Samuel's expressions of displeasure were thus shown to be a message to them from the God whose rule they had treated so lightly.

LESSONS.

I.—Whenever a nation rejects God, such rejection will be followed by signs of God's displeasure. The conception which Israel now had of a King was not God's conception, and their conception of God was not that which He had given them in

His words and deeds. They would have a God and Kings after their own hearts, hence they received signs of Divine displeasure; and, in the latter days, for rejecting the Divine ideal King in human flesh, they became, as a nation, a sign to all other nations of the consequences which follow the non-improvement of national privileges (1 Kings ix. 6-9). Nations who do not find the God they want in revelation will make one after their own likeness (Psa. l. 21); but signs will not be wanting of the displeasure of that King who is "light" (1 John i. 5), dwelling in that moral "light which no mortal can approach unto" (1 Tim. vi. 16; see Isa. lx. 12).

II.—The continuance of a nation's greatness depends upon the relation of individual members of it to the Living God. The beauty of the garden depends upon each flower being placed in right relations to the light.

III.—The servants of God sin against Him when they neglect to pray for their fellow countrymen (verse 23). We should pray for them—1. Because they are our fellow-creatures (1 Tim. ii. 1). 2. Because, as a body politic, we have an interest in their right relations to God (1 Cor. xii. 26). 3. Because national love ought to be an element in every Christian's character (Rom. x. 1).

SELECTED—I.

The revelation of the Lord's power through Samuel has for its aim—

I.—To glorify the name of God, and to exhibit the people's high calling as chosen people and God's property.

II.—To show more strikingly the people's sin in unfaithfulness and disobedience, and thereby induce sincere repentance.

III.—To show the penitent people the source of consolation and help, and fix in their hearts the ground of hope for future salvation.—*Lange's Commentary.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—Unseasonable weather is one of God's punishments.

We suffer sometimes from lack of rain to moisten the earth and prevent the miseries of drought. Such a calamity was inflicted upon Israel on account of sin in the days of Elijah (1 Kings, xvii. 1). At other times rain is unseasonable and injurious, as was the case in the present instance. Solomon intimates (Prov. xxvi. 1) that "rain in harvest," rarely, if ever, happened. But now it comes at the call of the prophet, to mar the fruits of the earth, and injure the harvest, "that they might perceive their wickedness to be great."

II.—We must ask for fair and seasonable weather upon no other condition than that of repentance.

We must bring forth fruits meet for repentance, if we expect that the earth should bring forth fruits meet for our sustenance; for God sometimes thinks fit to withhold these blessings, to make us to know their worth by the want of them. He is sometimes pleased to send us an abundance of good things to see how we will use them, and whether we will grow better by them. But if we consume them upon our lusts, as Israel did here, instead of having more, that which we have shall be taken away.

Hence let us learn—

1.—By God's punishment to amend our lives.

2.—For His clemency to give Him praise and glory.

Matthew Hole.

SELECTED—III.

Consider—

I.—Men have so many ways of shifting off their own guilt, that unless they be taken in the act, they will hardly confess it, and when convicted of the fact, they will deny the fault, or the measure. To cut off all excuses, therefore, Samuel appeals to God, the highest judge, for His sentence, and dares trust to a miraculous conviction. Had not Samuel before consulted with his Maker, and received warrant for this act, that would have been presumption which was now a noble improvement of faith.

II.—God's answer.

Rather than Israel shall go clear away with a sin, God will accuse and arraign them from heaven. No sooner hath Samuel's voice ceased than God's voice begins. Every crack of thunder spake judgment against the rebellious Israelites, and every drop of rain was a witness of their sin. Now they found that they had displeased Him who rules in heaven by rejecting the man who ruled for Him on earth.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

THREE DAYS' PESTILENCE.

"*So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed*," *etc.*—2 Samuel xxiv. 15.

Observe—

I.—The three different characters who were unitedly the occasion of this miraculous visitation.

1. The character of *David.* There were strong tendencies in this man to obey the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The present sin was evidently dictated by the latter passion, and although he possessed power within him to kill the unlawful desire as it rose in his breast, he permitted the thought of his thousands of warriors to carry him on to the committal of a crime. The command of God, that whenever the people were numbered, each one should offer a ransom (Exod. xxx. 12), shows the danger there was that such an enumeration would tend to forgetfulness of the God who had made them great. It is to be noted that Moses numbered the people in obedience only to a Divine command (Numb. i. 2). The resistance which David made to the counsel of a man much worse than himself (verses 3 and 4), aggravates his transgression. The man who breaks through a *double* fence before he takes a leap which will do him a fatal injury, must be strong in

his determination to have his own way. David was fenced about both by the voice of his own conscience, and by the persuasions of Joab, and was therefore far more blameable than a man who is less enlightened, and who has no adviser. 2. The character of Satan as exhibited in the fact that he tempted David on to carry out in deed what he had encouraged in thought. While a fire is confined to one man's house, even if it burns that house to its foundation, all other dwellings are unharmed; but when it lays hold of surrounding buildings, all the city may be endangered. When an evil thought is confined to a man's own spirit, kept within the limits of thinking or desiring, though it may char his own soul, and blacken it with the very blackness of perdition, the evil ends with himself. The aim of Satan is to develop men's thoughts into action, so that others may be harmed. "Satan stood up against *Israel*, and provoked David to number Israel" (1 Chron. xxi. 1). 3. The character of God, as shown in the reproof of David's sin and its punishment. When a soul is determined, at all risks, to sin against conscience, Satan finds prey which is altogether congenial to his desires; and as the bird of prey is permitted to fasten upon the carcase which suits his appetite, so the evil one is permitted by God to do his worst with one who has deliberately chosen his own way. But the motive of the Divine Being is to bring back to the right way by chastisement, while that of the devil is to complete the ruin. Thus we have here set forth by His action, the character of *God*, which is nothing but goodness; the character of *Satan*, which is wholly malicious towards men; and the character of *one* who had much, both of *God* and the *devil* in him.

II.—The nature of the Divine visitation.

It seems entitled to be regarded as miraculous, inasmuch as it was a Divine interposition foretold for a specified object—the punishment of a particular sin—and the character of the visitation was left to human choice, and was suddenly re-

moved in consequence of human intercession. Many providential visitations may be sent for the punishment of national or individual sin. But they are not foretold; no choice is permitted to the offender, their operation is not connected with any superhuman manifestation (verse 17), and their removal is not so instantaneous.

LESSONS.

I.—That the true repentance of man leads to the repentance of God (verse 16). It seems evident that the angel's hand was stayed before the expiration of three days, or the command given in verse 16 would have been needless. If a general issues an order for certain measures of destruction to be carried out within a given time, the issue of a second order would imply the annulling of the first, provided it was in any way contradictory of the former. We know that no angel would exceed the commands received, hence we conclude that the repentance of David expressed in verse 10 had not been in vain, and that God anticipated his public confession (verse 17) by arresting the pestilence. The change of David's disposition, or feelings, wrought a change in God's treatment of him. It gives God pleasure when chastisement brings such a condition of heart as enables Him to say, "It is enough, stay now thine hand."

II.—Repentance or non-repentance after sin, settles the question of character, and hence the position of a man in relation to God. A child's character can be better estimated by the way in which he behaves under his father's just displeasure than by counting the actual number of the transgressions he commits. So is it with God's children. The godly flee *to* God when they have sinned, the ungodly flee *from* Him (Psa. xxxii. 1-8; 1 John i. 8).

III.—The depth of repentance is shown by the extent of human sacrifice (verse 24), as we are told the depth of the root of a tree may be known by the height of its branches

(2 Cor. v. 14, 15); 1 Tim. i. 13). It is noteworthy that David's sacrifice was offered upon the spot where the father of his race offered that which cost him *much* (Gen. xxii).

IV.—The children of God must have chastisement for sin as well as repentance of it. Chastisement deepens the sense of the transgression and vindicates the impartiality of God (Amos iii. 2; 1 Cor. xi. 32).

SELECTED—I.

This history leads us to notice—

I.—The severity of God in punishing sin.

The sin which David committed was exceeding great. It was manifest even to so wicked a man as Joab. His punishment was proportionately severe. What shall we therefore think of sin? Is it so light a matter as men generally imagine?

II.—The goodness of God in pardoning sin.

David evinced true contrition by pleading that the punishment might fall on him the guilty one, and not on his innocent people. Instantly did God command the angel to "stay his hand."

III.—The effect which the sins of individuals produce on the community.

It was in reality for *Israel's* sin that this punishment was inflicted. "The anger of God was kindled against Israel" (see also 1 Chron. xxi. 1). When David had sinned, both he and his people were punished for their iniquity. In a word, for *Israel's* sin *he* was left, and for *his* sin they were punished. Let us therefore, be on our guard, lest we be instrumental to the destruction, rather than the welfare, of others.

SELECTED—II.

I.—When anything usurps the place of God in the hearts of men, it is observed by Him with a just resentment.

We here find one of the worthies of the church of God taken

in this snare, upon which the divine prerogative is asserted in the most humbling manner. The tide of all worldly prosperity is the nearest an ebb when it diverts the possessors from giving God the glory.

II.—Chastisement for sin is certain.

It is true an indulgence was granted to David, but no remission; the rod must alight in some form or other. For every sorrow we may assign one cause, viz., *sin.*

III.—Whatever correction is necessary to God's creatures, it is their request that He may be the immediate dispenser of it.

1. Because He is the fountain of mercy, and limits the punishment to the necessity. 2. He chastises to *reclaim,* and not to *revenge.* 3. What comes from the hand of the Lord melts the heart and humbles the soul, as the rod in the hand of man can never do

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THE PROPHECY AGAINST JEROBOAM AND ITS ATTENDANT CIRCUMSTANCES.

"*And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the Word of the Lord unto Bethel,*" *etc.*—1 Kings xiii. 1.

We have here—

A miraculous foreknowledge the occasion of a miracle of judgment and mercy.

The prophet foretells, 350 years before the occurrence took place, the very name of the king who should terribly avenge the calf worship of Bethel; a prophecy as remarkable as that of Isaiah when he mentioned Cyrus by name, and described so minutely his deeds in relation to Israel (Isa. xlv. 1-3). If we had as long life as those who lived before the flood, we might, by means of memory, recall and describe events which took place several hundred years ago. The gift of prophecy has the same faculty in relation to the future as memory has in

relation to the past. Prophecy is history written beforehand (see Bishop Butler's re-publication of *Nature*). The foretelling of the future judgment roused the passion of Jeroboam, and his endeavour to seize the messenger of God led to the second double miracle—the withering of his hand and the rending of the altar. The king himself by his prayer (verse 6) acknowledged that the visitation was occasioned by a superhuman intervention. Then follows the miracle of mercy—the hand was restored as suddenly as it had been smitten.

LESSONS.

I.—All human power and skill engaged against God will wither. The hand of man is the bodily mark of his superiority to the animal creation; it represents his power and skill. By it he lives. It is the bread winner of the body. By its skilful use he imitates the works of God in nature, and by its means he sends down his thoughts to posterity. Jeroboam's outstretched hand was the type of all human opposition to God's rule, especially the opposition of the rulers of the world. Its withering was the exposition of "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper" (Isa. liv. 17); "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (Psa. ii. 4, &c.).

II.—Physical blessing is of more importance to the ungodly man than morality of character. Jeroboam was anxious to have his hand restored, but the withering up of his moral nature under the displeasure of Jehovah was not considered by him as a calamity. Christ's teaching is, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off" (Matt. xviii. 8), *i.e.*, count no earthly loss worthy of a thought compared with an injury to the spiritual life.

SELECTED—I.

The double miracle seems to testify to Jeroboam—

I.—That the juices and springs of life are renewed from an invisible source; that it is another than the dead thing he is worshipping who can dry them up or give them their natural

flow. A protest exactly in accordance with that which Moses bore against the gods of Egypt—*i.e.*, the protest on behalf of regularity and law, and for a God of regularity and law, with whom are the daily issues of life and death, against the seeker of charms in natural things, against the worshipper of capricious deities.

II.—The altar is rent and the ashes poured out as a sure and everlasting testimony that law and order shall not be violated with impunity by any ruler, under any religious pretext; that his religious acts are more hateful in the sight of God than all his other acts, and must hasten the vengeance upon those.—*F. D. Maurice.*

SELECTED—II.

From this narrative learn—

I.—The exceeding vanity of attempting, by crooked and sinful means, to further our worldly interests. If Jeroboam had not been too anxious to secure the crown to his children, the same God who made him king might have kept it on their heads for evermore.

II.—The true use which should be made of afflictions sent by God.

We should pray for deliverance, not only from our present calamity, but from the sin which brought it on. Jeroboam prayed that his hand might be cured. It was cured—and yet he went on offending God till he had sealed the ruin of his family.

III.—The great necessity of attending to God's warnings if we hope to escape His punishment.

God seldom sends the latter till he has tried the former. If Jeroboam had been brought to himself by the drying up of his hand, and by the rending of the altar, he would have escaped the calamities of his later life.—*Bishop Heber.*

THE SLAYING OF THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.

"*A lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it; the lion also stood by the carcase.*"—1 Kings xiii. 24.

Here is a very remarkable death, arising from a very remarkable deception.

I. The deception was remarkable. 1. From the fact that the deceiver was, by profession, a prophet of the true God, whose business especially it is to be a truth-teller. (Observe he is not called a *false* prophet, and the word of the Lord really came to him at the time mentioned in verse 20.) When a physician transgresses a known law of health, or a judge becomes a violator of the law which he professes to uphold, more wonder is excited than when ordinary men do the same things. 2. From the *age* of the man who practised it. He had lived long enough to see the evil fruits of lying; he was feeling, in the growing infirmities of age, the fruits of man's first listening to the father of lies in Eden. Yet he was full of zeal in the execution of his plan. "Saddle me the ass," &c. (verse 13). He even brought God's name in to be a co-worker with himself (verse 18). 3. Because the successful deceiver became the infallible denouncer of the man whom he had deceived (verses 21, 22). This has had its parallel in human history.

II. Here is a death, neither natural nor accidental, in the common acceptation of the terms, but miraculous,—a punishment sudden and terrible, for an act of disobedience. The man was slain by a lion which made no attempt to eat the carcase afterwards, but even became its sentinel and permitted other men to take it from his care without attacking them. That the ass and the lion should have stood peacefully together, the one unterrified, and the other unmolesting, is a proof of a superhuman element.

Lessons from this death—

1. In relation to the truth he had just uttered. The people

of that age might have surely learned from it, that if God visited with such swift retribution the disobedience of His own servant, He would assuredly fulfil the prophecy against the disobedience of Israel and their king. The bones of the *true* man remained in Bethel as a guarantee that judgment would fall upon the *false* prophets whom he had denounced.

II. Men of all time may learn that the word of a stranger is not a sufficient basis upon which to build a friendship.

"Do not dull thy palm with entertainment of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade," but let the character be first known. We must not believe a man is sent to us from heaven merely because he *says* he is, we must *know* that he is from his life. If we see a fruit-tree only in the spring, when there is nothing upon it but leaves, we cannot form a correct judgment of its value. Its fruit must first be tasted. So Christ teaches us that we are to judge of men (Matt. vii. 20).

SELECTED—I.

Notice—

I.—The instrument of the miracle.

A lion met him and slew him. There were, then, wild and ravenous beasts in the land of Canaan. Why did not God drive them out as He drove out the Canaanites? Probably: 1. To show that there is no absolute security to be expected here. 2. To retain in the land a scourge to whip transgressors with, as He saw cause. He reckons them among the plagues and punishments that He used to chastise the rebellious (2 Kings xvii. 25; Ezek. xiv. 15-21). And their riddance is mentioned as a singular blessing (Lev. xxvi. 6).

II.—The efficient cause of the miracle.

The transgression of a command of God. We may here notice divers things. 1. The children of God are often punished, as to temporal punishments, when the wicked escape. This man falls under so sad a curse, while no hurt comes to Jeroboam. Why? "You have I known of all the families of the earth"—what then? "Therefore I will *not* punish you?"—

No; "Therefore I *will*" (Amos iii. 2). For a man to go on uncontrolled in his sinning, is the very preface to destruction. 2. God will not abide to have any of His commands dallied or trifled with. Though one is less than another in regard of their matter, yet all are alike in regard to their Author. 3. God did not cast away all care of His prophet, though He so sorely punished him. Though He punished him to the death, He showed a miracle for him when he was dead. So we may believe that, though he died for his sin, yet he died not in it.—*Dr. J. Lightfoot (adapted).*

SELECTED—II.

From this narrative learn—

I.—That secret enemies are much more dangerous to the peace of God's servants than open ones. To the royal invitation, the man of God answers peremptorily (verse 8). But he was drawn aside by one who pretended godliness.

II.—In doubtful matters the most certain rule is to be preferred to every other. Had the man of God done this, all would have been well. Nothing could be so certain to him as the direction received from God Himself. It was not likely that so plain a command would be revoked. Let us not distrust our own settled convictions because men talk cleverly on the other side. "Let God be true and every man a liar."

III.—The inferior creatures are just that to us that God makes them. The lion as he walks majestically through his native forests is a creature at once to admire and fear. Yet how submissive is he, who owns no master on earth, to the law of obedience impressed by God upon all His meaner creatures. One prophet passes unhurt through a den of lions. Another is to suffer for his fault visibly and strikingly, and the animal who will not brook the hand of man upon him, comes as readily as the swift-winged messenger of heaven, at the Almighty's call. The slayer guards his victim till friends have secured the body, and then, like a faithful servant, whose errand is done, departs his own way.—*J. H. Gurney.*

ELIJAH FED BY RAVENS.

"*And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.*" —1 Kings xvii. 6.

I.—The prophet was sure of sustenance, because the command to feed him was given to creatures incapable of disobedience. "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee."

God is said to command the earth (Psa. xxxiii. 9), the heavenly bodies (Isa. xlv. 12), the waters of the sea (Prov. viii. 29), etc., because He uses them to fulfil His will, as the engine-driver may be said to command his engine, or the electrician his battery, when they set free the power of the steam, or the electric fluid. With this great difference, that God *originates* the forces with which He works. In this sense He is said to have commanded the ravens to feed Elijah, thereby making sure the sustenance of the prophet, because the creatures were *not moral agents.*

II.—The manner in which Elijah was fed was miraculous.

1. Because the birds who ministered to him were birds of prey, and would, therefore, be inclined to eat the flesh which they brought. 2. Because they brought it to one man in particular, and they brought it at stated and regular intervals.

III.—Although the manner in which Elijah was fed was miraculous, it was in accordance with the idea of creation.

Man was created "to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air" (Gen. i. 28); "all things were put under his feet" (Psa. viii. 6). They were intended to be his servants, and although he has forfeited his right to rule *them* by refusing to acknowledge God's right to rule *him*, yet, when he returns to his allegiance, he may expect in some degree, to return to his position as king of the creatures beneath him, and to be ministered to by them.

LESSONS.

I.—Our inferiors may, in the hands of God, be greater blessings than our equals or superiors. The ravens were better friends to Elijah at this time than the king of Israel or any of his subjects.

II.—The servants of God may learn a lesson from the ravens and restrain their natural and lawful desires when, by so doing, they can serve a higher purpose.

SELECTED—I.

I.—Notice the strange caterers for Elijah.

I know not whether it had been more miraculous to preserve him without meat, or to provide meat by such mouths. He that could have fed Elijah by angels will feed him by ravens. Thus God gives His prophet and us a proof of His absolute command over all His creatures to win our trust in all extremities.

II.—God gives orders for competency, not for wantonness.

Those of God's family may not be curious, nor disdainful. It ill becomes them to be slaves to their palate. Yet the munificence of God will have Elijah's table better furnished than that of his fellows in the cave of Obadiah. Doubtless, one bit from the mouth of the raven was more pleasing to Elijah than a whole tablefull of Ahab's.

III.—It is no unusual thing with God to suffer His own children to be enwrapped in the common calamities of offenders.

The brook Cherith shall not, for Elijah's sake, be exempt from the universal drought; he himself must feel the smart of that which he had denounced. God makes difference in the use and issue of their stripes, not in the infliction. The corn is cut down with the weeds, but to a better purpose.—*Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

Notice—

I.—What a task is here for Elijah's humility.

A lowering thing indeed for so mighty a prophet to be fed by little birds. "Consider the ravens," said our Lord, "how much more are ye better than the fowls!" Yet Elijah was to be beholden to these fowls. He was to be boarded by them day by day, and must sit down patiently till they came to feed him.

II.—What an exhibition of the gracious care of God.

The Lord careth for His people's bodies as well as their souls. Surely this incident teaches us that if they "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," all other necessary things shall "be added unto them." The Lord's poor are the Lord's care. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; . . . and verily thou shalt be fed" (Psa. xxxvii. 3).

III.—How the most unlikely instruments sometimes minister to the needs of the godly.

How unlikely were *ravens* to feed the prophet. Birds whose instincts would have prompted them rather to snatch his food away. So how unexpectedly at times do even the enemies of godliness promote the interests of the godly. The ravens of the world, its cruel, covetous, rapacious men, have often, one way or other, been purveyors to His church. The brethren of Joseph contributed to Joseph's exaltation, and Haman had to hold the bridle for the man whose life he aimed at.—*Adapted from A. Roberts.*

THE INCREASE OF THE WIDOW'S BARREL OF MEAL AND CRUSE OF OIL.

"*And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by Elijah.*"—1 Kings xvii. 16.

I.—There are laws in God's universe by which bread can be given to the eater without multiplying the seed of the sower.

The ordinary laws in operation in the world for the supply of food are those by which increase is made to depend upon *growth* through *life*. Whatever sustains human life *grows*, by reason of indwelling life, and is multiplied by reproduction. But in the narrative before us we have the revelation of a method of increasing food without growth. God may have as many ways of producing bread, as He has kinds of bread-stuffs. As minerals are added to from without, so God can add to vegetables in the same manner when He pleases.

II.—Human faith is needed to bring into operation the law by which miracles are wrought.

The ordinary wonders of creation connected with growth are wrought without the co-operation of human faith. The sun shines upon the infidel's corn-field as effectively as upon the Christian's, and the ungodly man partakes of the bountiful gifts of God's ordinary providence as well as the holiest man. But the operation of extraordinary laws demand certain conditions of mind on the part of man. In the case before us, the faith of the prophet is shown in his confident declaration, "Thus saith the Lord;" and that of the widow in her obedience to His command (verse 13).

III.—Self-denial springing from faith in God, will bring Divine interposition and an increase of blessing.

The widow of Zarephath denied herself the gratification of

appetite when she was doubtless suffering from want of food; more than that, she delayed to appease the hunger of her *son* and made a cake *first* for God's prophet. Her self-denial in the matter of her son was of the same kind as that of Abraham, although not in the same degree. She was willing to make her child's life of secondary consideration when God so commanded, and, like Abraham, she received a most abundant reward. God will be under obligation to no man. "A cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple" (Matt. x. 42) shall in "no wise lose its reward." If we give unto Him, He will give us back "good measure and running over."

Lessons.

I.—God may send His servants where His and their enemies have most power, in order to manifest His power to preserve them. Zarephath was a city of Zidon, the native home of Jezebel (ch. xvi. 31), Elijah's bitterest enemy. She possessed power there, doubtless, and could probably have compassed his death there more easily than in the land of Israel. Yet he dwelt there peacefully for "many days," or "a full year."

II.—The most unlikely people may be used by God to help our need. There must have been many people both in Israel and Zidon who possessed abundant means to help Elijah, but his help came through a poor widow on the brink of starvation.

> "God moves in a mysterious way
> His wonders to perform."

III.—We must use what we have in order to receive the increase which God intends we shall have. The seed-corn must be used if we are to receive the increase, the little strength of the man recovering from sickness must be used in order to obtain more; the knowledge of things human or divine must be brought into exercise that more may be acquired, as certainly as the Zidonian widow must use every day the meal and oil needed for the sustenance of herself and her household if they were to increase. "Thou *oughtest* therefore to have put my

money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury" (Matt. xxv. 27).

SELECTED—I.

I.—How hard precepts doth God lay where He intends bounty.

We are wont to put hard questions to scholars whom we would promote to higher forms. If God had not meant the widow's preservation He would not have required of her to see her last morsels go down another's throat. In all achievements the difficulty of the enterprise makes way for the glory of the actor.

II.—Giving, not getting, not saving, is the way to abundance.

Who can fear want by a merciful liberality, when he sees the Sareptan had famished if she had not given, and by giving, abounded?—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—In regions most unexpected those may be found who know God.

In a heathen land Elijah finds in a poor widow what he had sought in vain in Israel: faith in the living God.

II.—When the need is greatest, then is God nearest.

On the very day when the widow comes to her last supplies, her distress comes to an end, and she has thenceforth her daily bread.

III.—The same God who spoke the promise by Elijah has promised us, that so long as the earth lasts, seed-time and harvest shall not cease (Gen. viii. 22).

We are astonished at the little miracle at Sarepta, but we pass over with indifference the large miracle which is repeated year by year for the whole world.—*Lange's Commentary.*

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON.

"*And it came to pass, after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick, and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him,*" *etc.*—1 Kings xvii. 17-24.

I.—In the miracle which God had wrought to sustain life, the prophet saw the pledge that He would restore life. "Give me thy son" (v. 19).

Elijah, the widow, and her son, had been kept alive by a continual miracle, therefore the prophet had reason to hope that the life which had been so wonderfully maintained would be given back. The great things that God *has done*, may be made a ground of expectation of greater things that He *will do*.

II.—It needed faith to create the expectation, because from the human standpoint, it needs a greater exercise of power to restore life than to sustain it.

One spark in the grate gives a little fire upon which to work, and by care and skill may become the nucleus of a large fire. So in the increase of the widow's oil and meal; a little of each was left, and the miracle consisted in the *increase*. But in the widow's son "there was *no breath* left," the last spark of life had gone out, and the miracle needed was one of *re-creation*.

III.—The faith of the prophet manifested itself in earnest prayer and symbolic action. "He cried unto the Lord," "He stretched himself upon the child" (verses 20, 21).

These acts indicate his earnest desire for the child's restoration.

Lessons.

I.—A spiritual relationship may have more influence to help us than a natural one. The relation of Elijah to the widow was a moral one. But he could help her when those related to her by blood were powerless. She herself was more

nearly related to her child than any one else, yet she could not bring him back to life.

II.—Special blessings are connected with special persons. There was no other man in Israel at this time whose prayer would have brought the dead to life. God has, in all ages of the world, connected special blessings with special individuals.

III.—Prayer is the great means by which special blessings are obtained.

IV.—To prayer must be added the use of those means which seem most adapted to attain the end. The prophet brought his own warm living body into contact with the dead body of the child. It was the only means within his reach, and though useless in itself, was acceptable to God.

SELECTED.

I.—We can never hold ourselves secure from evils.

The dearth overcome, the mother looks hopefully on her only son, promising herself much joy in his life and prosperity, when sickness comes and does that which the famine had but threatened.

II.—The greatest prophet of God must content himself with so much of God's counsel as He will please to reveal.

Elijah had not been premonished of the sudden death of this child; he who knew the remote affairs of the world, might not know what God would do within his own roof.

III.—What miracle is impossible to faithful prayers?

There cannot be more difference betwixt Elijah's devotion and ours, than between supernatural and ordinary acts; if he therefore obtained miraculous favours by his prayers, do we doubt of those which are within the sphere of nature and use.

IV.—The mercy of God is fain to provide new helps for our infirmities as well as new trials of our faith.

What the widow's meal and oil had assured her of, the death of her son made her doubt, and now her faith revived with his resurrection.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

Here is—

I.—The forming of a branch that bore fruit.

The widow was a person of real piety; but then as it would seem, like Lydia, or Cornelius in the first instance, she was acquainted with God in a partial and superficial manner. Probably her religious feelings were more natural than spiritual. Two invisible guests break in upon her; the Lord and the Spirit. The one inflicts the blow, the other expounds it. The one slays her son, the other makes her sensible of the reason why. Hence her language to Elijah.

II.—Its bearing more fruit.

"Now I know that thou art a man of God," etc. By this renewed testimony to Elijah's prophetic mission she became unquestionably assured of the Divine truth and his word, and stood henceforth upon other ground. From being a devout person she became a daughter of Abraham's faith.—*Adapted from Krummacher.*

THE DESCENT OF FIRE UPON THE ALTAR ON MOUNT CARMEL.

"*And the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the sacrifice,*" *etc.* —1 Kings xviii. 38.

Notice—

I.—The miraculous fire was symbolic of the Divine Nature.

1.—We are told by scientific men that all natural fire has its origin in the sun—the source of all light and heat, of all the life and beauty of the earth. So this flame, descending as a message of the Eternal God, pointed to Him as the source of

all spiritual life, and consequently of all moral beauty. 2. Fire is not, in the least degree, changed in its character by contact with other forms of matter; if we throw into the fire, or expose to a ray of light, the most polluted thing, the light, the flame is as pure as before. So the Holy One cannot be polluted by contact with the vilest of His creatures. God incarnate could "eat with publicans and sinners" without sustaining the least moral injury. 3. Although fire cannot be transformed, it can and does transform all that comes within its influence. So can the Divine Being. Hence fire has ever been regarded as a type of the pure and Holy God, not only by Jews and Christians, but often also by men who have not possessed a written revelation, as the Parsees of ancient and modern times, whose form of religion is perhaps the purest ever invented by man.

II.—The descent of fire after the prayer was a symbolic expression of Divine approval.

There are various ways of expressing approval among men without the use of words. Sometimes the silence of action is more expressive than any sound of words. God's messages to men have been and are generally silent. The Heavens "declare" His glory without "speech or language" (Psa. xix. 3). That which appeals to the sight is perhaps more impressive than that which appeals to the sense of hearing. Hence God has often expressed His approval of His servants' actions in the same way as He did here to Elijah (see Lev. ix. 24; 1 Chron. xxi. 26; 2 Chron. vii. 1; Judges vi. 21).

III.—The contest that was thus decided by fire was symbolic of the contest which is still going on between light and darkness, and which will be decided by fire in the future (2 Thess. i. 8).

1. It was symbolic in the inequality of the numbers. One prophet of the true God against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal (verse 22). If the moral census of the world was

now taken, probably the proportion would be about the same. 2. It was symbolic, in that the minority was, and is, *more* than the majority. The *one* man defeated the *many* men. There are least that are most. 3. Symbolic, because praying and working will bring the "restitution of all things." As Elijah restored the altar and continued in prayer before it till the decisive hour came, so God's minority labour and pray, and, at the evening of the present dispensation, heaven will yield the answer.

SELECTED—I.

The world has already received more than one answer by fire, so that it ought not to require another; but one more such answer awaits an evil world (2 Pet. iii. 10).

God answered by fire the first transgressions, when Cherubim and a flaming sword were planted at the gate of Paradise. God answered Sodom and Gomorrah by fire, and by a fiery vision confirmed His promises to Abraham (Gen. xv. 17). From a flame of fire in the bush He spake to Moses: and out of the fire and clouds and darkness to Israel on Mount Sinai. By fire He answered the transgression of Nadab and Abiram (Numb. xvi. 35) and Israel, in the matter of Korah. By fire He showed at various times, besides the one we are contemplating, His acceptance of the service of His servants.

God likewise answered the waiting apostles at Pentecost by cloven tongues as of fire.

SELECTED—II.

"And the God that answereth by fire, let him be God." Let us spiritually apply this to ourselves.

The fire of the Holy Spirit, with which Messiah baptises every believer, is the witness of God in every such believer. This fire consumes the dross of his corruptions, and warms, cheers, and enlightens his soul. He that is insensible to the testimony of this witness is still dead in trespasses and sins. Let us show, then, that our hearts burn within us by the Spirit of our life and conversation before God and man. May the

Lord inscribe His name on our hearts in the flaming letters of His love, that He may not see it necessary to write it in our ashes, in the eternally glowing characters of His just displeasure. —*Krummacher.*

ELIJAH FED BY AN ANGEL.

"*And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat,*" *etc.*— 1 Kings xix. 5-8.

Consider—

I.—The antecedent circumstances which led to the miraculous feeding.

There had been a great victory. When a warrior returns home after doing public service for his country, he is met with shouts of grateful welcome, and he finds himself the great object of attraction wherever he goes. When the Hebrew prophet came down from Carmel, after God had given him the visible sign of his approbation in the sight of all Israel, and the long-looked for rain had refreshed the thirsty land, as if in token of God's approbation of the people's confession, he might have expected that there would have been enough goodwill towards him at least to have protected his life from the revenge of Jezebel. But not one of all the multitude that so lately crowded round him seems to have offered him protection or even shelter; so we find him in the wilderness, disappointed, weary and lonely. His flight does not necessarily imply moral cowardice. Our Lord's command to His disciples was, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another" (Matt. x. 23), and He Himself "would not walk in Jewry because the Jews sought to kill him" (John vii. 1). Martyrdom is only a virtue when fleeing is cowardice. There is great wisdom sometimes in the return of an outpost upon the main body. The man may then face about and give the

enemy battle; whereas, if he had done it before, he would have thrown his life away. Elijah's great disappointment had led him to pray for death. He was like a swimmer, who has been battling fruitlessly with rough billows to save a life for which he would have given his own, and now lies half-dead upon the shore, his strength entirely gone for the time.

II.—The place of the miracle.

It was the wilderness in which God had fed his fathers for forty years with "angels' food" (Ps. lxxviii. 25). There God had done daily for millions what He now did for one. We should not expect that He would let His zealous prophet die for want of food where He had sustained so many of his ancestors, most of whom were far below Elijah in moral worth.

III.—The manner of the feeding.

It remarkably illustrates the tender sympathy of God. It is not always enough to supply men with food. They may be in so weak a state bodily, or so depressed mentally, as not to care to take that upon which their recovery depends. They need the persuasion, the ministry, of another. So did Elijah. His life did not seem to him worth preserving, and all motive for exertion seemed gone. Hence, God not only sent him food, but sent an angel to persuade him to eat, and the *sympathy* of his angelic visitor was no doubt a part of the meal in whose strength he afterwards went "forty days."

IV.—The effect of the meal.

"He went in the strength of that meal forty days and forty nights" (verse 18). So that not only was the meal miraculously provided and administered, but its effects were miraculous. The natural world gives us many instances of the power of God in the increase of the one into the many. The supernatural acts of Christ afford many more illustrations of increase in quantity. In the present case, God's power was simply manifested in a different way, and the sustaining power of the

food was intensified instead. The meal prepared by the angel in the wilderness prolonged his life to receive: 1. A higher revelation from God. 2. A far more correct estimate of his life's work. 3. A much more triumphant exit from the world than that for which he prayed.

SELECTED—I.

The angelic visit to Elijah teaches us—

I.—That virtue, neither in the hours of rest or of activity, is without notice or regard.

See the holy man reclining quietly under the juniper tree. Then the "Shepherd of Israel," "whose eyes are everywhere, beholding the evil and the good," thus addressed one of the "ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation:" Go to the wilderness of Arabia and prepare food for the prophet who sleeps in the desert. "Ready to hearken to the voice of His word," the celestial messenger soon reaches the Arabian wild. A more than human voice whispers in the prophet's ear, "Arise and eat." Thus even in romantic wilds, where no human voice is heard, God is good to "His chosen, and visits them with His salvation." A fulfilment this of "His place shall be a munition of rocks; his bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure" (Isa. xxxiii. 16).

II.—It reminds us of the comfortable doctrine of a particular providence.

Indeed, to suppose one virtuous individual overlooked is repugnant to the ideas we entertain of Divine wisdom and goodness. Occasional interpositions of that power to punish vice and succour virtue form part of the great plan of God. They are as much a part of the established order of nature as any physical laws which regulate the material system, and His agency is sometimes as conspicuous in the fortunes of individuals as in the fate of empires. A feeble infant, whose deliverance may have been deemed of little importance, may involve in the preservation of his life the revolution of kingdoms

and the salvation of his country. What, indeed, is a general providence, but a collected amount of particular providences?—*Thos. Laurie, D.D.*

SELECTED—II.

Let me remark to you from this narrative—

I.—That God will support those who honestly and bravely do His work.

Elijah fled from the wrath of Jezebel and took refuge in the wilderness; here he is quite alone, broken in heart, despondent in mind, yet here God's angel ministered to him, and he found a table prepared in the wilderness.

II.—That it is not the state of a person's feelings which is pleasing or displeasing to God.

A man may be in great despondency, but this may be merely the result of natural temperament, or bodily infirmity, and even if these do occasionally lead to want of faith, God will pardon this, and not only so, will take means to remove the cause (Psa. ciii. 14). This feeding of Elijah when he was apparently more asleep than awake, is a beautiful exposition of Psalm cxxvii. 2—"So He giveth His *beloved sleeping*."—*Luther's translation, and others.*

III.—Though God suffers His servants to be tried beyond their own inherent strength, He never suffers them to be tried beyond what He Himself enables them to undergo.

The angel spake to Elijah of a further "journey" which he was now to undertake, "even to Horeb, the mount of God," where no more sustenance for his bodily life would be found than was found by Israel of old; therefore, He who multiplied the loaves and fishes at His pleasure, gave to this one meal the sustaining power of many.—*Adapted from Krummacher and H. Goodwin.*

GOD'S MANIFESTATION TO ELIJAH AT HOREB.

"*And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains,*" *etc.*—1 Kings xix. 11-13.

We learn here—

I.—That the Divine working in nature is intended by God to prepare men for a higher revelation.

This was the intention of the miracles of Christ. His first disciples were thus led to forsake all and follow Him as their teacher (Luke v. 4-11), and, from time to time, His manifesting Himself as the Lord of nature led them to receive, with more reverence, His teaching (Mark iv. 14). The flame of fire enwrapping the bush in Horeb was intended to arrest the attention of Moses, and prepare his mind for the declaration of the will of God. So in the case of Elijah here, the hurricane, the earthquake, and the lightning, were all to bring the prophet into such a state of mind and heart as would best fit him to receive the higher revelation of God in the "still small voice." The ultimate intention, and the highest use, of all the phenomena of nature is, doubtless, to open men's ears to hear the voice of God as spoken unto us by His Son (Heb. i. 1). All nature is to minister to his mind and heart as well as to his body (Psa. viii.).

II.—When men reverentially listen to the lower forms of teaching, God gives them the higher revelation.

Nicodemus allowed the teaching of Christ in His miracles to bring conviction of His Divine mission to his heart (John iii. 2); how willingly the Saviour led him into the deeper mysteries of His kingdom (verse 16). Elijah had, doubtless, opened his whole being to the message God had for him, in the "great and strong wind," the earthquake, and the fire, hence God afterwards gave him the audible, intelligible, voice. The Psalmist heard the voiceless language of the heavens, and

God then enabled him to testity from experience to the power and preciousness of His "law and testimony" (Psa. xix.).

III.—That although the physical power of God is strong enough to terrify men into submission, He will have them brought to obedience by moral suasion.

The prophet longed for the eternal overthow of the forces of evil, by what we may call God's *physical* omnipotence. He would have had the wind blow Jezebel and her wicked court out of the world, and have opened the earth, or called down the lightning, upon the enemies of the true God. But that would not have changed men's characters. Elijah himself was not brought to return to his post of his duty by these displays of Almighty power, but by the gentle words which followed them.

NOTE.—God is the only person who has the right, because He is the only person who has the power to say what is success and what is failure (verse 18; Isa. xlix. 4; 1 Cor. iv. 3).

SELECTED—I.

Consider this scene—

I.—In its historical course.

The first sign is a tremendous wind. Just before, probably, the deepest silence had prevailed throughout the dreary desert. Suddenly all is uproar. The mountain tempest breaks forth, the bursting rocks thunder, as if the four winds, having been confined there, had suddenly broken loose from their prisons to fight together. The sandy desert is like a raging sea tossing its curling billows to the sky. Sinai is agitated as if the terrors of the law-giving were renewing around it. The terrors of an earthquake next ensue. The mountains and rocks, which were rent by the mighty wind, now threaten to fall on one another. Hills sink down, and valleys rise; chasms yawn and horrible depths unfold, as if the earth were removed out of its place. When this had ceased, an awful fire passes by. As the winds before, so now the flames come upon him from every side, and

the deepest shades of night are turned into the light of day. Elijah beholds the awfully sublime spectacle, but enjoys no cheering sense of the Divine presence. Now tranquility, like the stillness of the sanctuary, spreads gradually over all nature; and it seems as if every hill and dale, yea, the whole earth and skies, lay in silent homage at the footstool of the Eternal Majesty. The very mountains seem to worship; the whole scene is one of profound peace; and now he hears the still small voice.

II.—In the teaching it was probably meant to convey to Elijah.

We may imagine the prophet's saying to himself, "What hope is there of better things when God seems to work in vain? What shall reach the stubborn hearts of these people? Surely the time for judgment is come.

God seems to say, "My patience will bear yet longer with this stiff-necked people." "It were an easy thing for me to sweep them from the earth. The hurricane might be my messenger and turn the whole country into a desert; or the earth might rock to and fro so that every city of Israel might be a heap of ruins; or fire might consume their dwellings and their harvests in a single night. It is not for lack of power that I spare, but because I have pity. I have shown you what my vengeance might do, I have spoken to you in tones of love and gentleness; when your heart warms at my still small voice, remember that other hearts, who have held out against signs and wonders, may be softened by gentler dealing."

Notice—

III.—The apparent impression produced upon the mind of Elijah. He probably felt that he had been too impetuous at one time and too desponding at another. He repented probably of his hasty departure from Jezreel. The "still small voice" reproved, but it comforted also. He went forth again to work, and we hear no more complaints. His message was now like a still small voice to many; and did more, probably,

for God than when the brook Kishon ran red with the blood of Baal's prophets.—*J. H. Gurney and Krummacher.*

SELECTED—II.

Elijah fled to Horeb, the old desert in which Israel had wandered and where they received the law, as though he would find the comfort, by communion with the past, which the present failed to give him. There he was taught that God was to be found, not in public manifestation so much as by tokens personal and secret (see Isa. lvii. 15 ; Luke xvii. 21). May we not learn to read in this vision teaching and comfort for the latter days. Time was when the kingdom of Christ was manifested by a "rushing mighty wind," and the earthquake was that shaking of the place where the apostles were assembled (Acts iv. 31), and the fire was the "cloven tongues" which sat upon each of them. And the strong wind went forth into all the world and swept away the idols, and breathed life into dry bones and made them live. And the earthquake followed, and the kingdoms of the world fell before the kingdoms of Christ. And then came the fire, when the light of the Church burnt keen and manifest, like the flame of fire in the bush, attracting to it, by its shining, all who passed by. And now has come a time when we sometimes think the power of Christianity is not so manifest as in the past. Surely, then, it is cheering to read that after all God was not in the wind or the fire, or the earthquake, though He wrought through them ; but that His living and true word, "the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls, is a "still small voice," and that through it the Lord God of Elijah still reveals Himself to those who seek Him. The presence of Christ is still amongst us, in spite of our many sins.—*Adapted from J. H. Newman.*

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TWO CAPTAINS WITH THEIR COMPANIES.

"*Then the king sent unto him (Elijah) a captain of fifty with his fifty*," *etc.*—2 Kings i. 9-16.

Consider—

I.—The steps which led up to this miarcle.

1. Seeking help where it was not to be found in direct violation of the law of God. If a member of a family were to break his arm, and instead of applying to the family surgeon who had in the past given full proof of his skill, were to seek the advice of a quack, he would be sinning against himself, and insulting the man who was able and willing to cure him. This was the conduct of Ahaziah towards the God of his nation, when, having met with an accident, he sent to the god of Ekron, and thereby slighted and despised Him who alone could help him. This was followed by: 2. A Divine rebuke (verse 3). God does not leave transgressors to pursue their way without remonstrance. Visitations of disease and death are often, as this messenger from heaven was, sent to warn men of the consequences of a persistent course of disobedience. But Ahaziah persevered notwithstanding the Divine admonition, and sent: 3. A message to take Elijah prisoner. When an ox is being driven to the slaughter, he seems to be conscious of his coming doom, and tries to avoid being driven to the place of death. But men rush on to their own destruction even when God sends messengers to drive them *from* the way of ruin. The beast knows not only *his owner* (Isa. i. 3), but his *executioner*, but "my people doth not consider."

II.—The miracle itself.

1. The fire, if not miraculous in itself, was miraculous in its manner of executing the will of God. It came from heaven at the call of Elijah; it killed those persons who were involved

in the act of defiance against the prophet of God, and no others. 2. It was in keeping with the recent proof of Elijah's Divine commission given on Mount Carmel (1 Kings xviii. 38), and seemed a re-establishment of the claims then made. It declared that the forces of nature were the servants of the God of Israel who had called the Tishbite to be His prophet. 3. The miracle was arrested, and the prophet was arrested by a force not sent by the king (verses 13-15).

LESSONS.

I.—Help must be sought where God has appointed that it shall be found (John xiv. 6 ; Acts iv. 12).

II.—The responsibility of the individual man. Ahaziah's captains died, not for his sin, but for their participation in his defiance of God. The escape of the third captain proves this.

III.—When God has spoken He cannot change His word unless the sinner changes his way. Ahaziah "died according to the word of the Lord" (verse 11). If a physician warns a man that death will be the consequence of a certain course of life, he cannot change his *word* unless his patient changes his *way*.

IV.—The only strength that can conquer heaven is the strength of supplication. The clenched fist of the child cannot intimidate the parent, but the same hands clasped on his neck are mighty to prevail. "By strength shall no man prevail" (1 Sam. ii. 9) ; yet, "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me (Isa. xxvii. 5).

SELECTED—I.

Elijah's calling down fire from heaven vindicated.

It has been urged, from the rebuke which Christ gave to His disciples, who were for calling down fire from heaven, even as Elijah did, that the prophet was moved by a sour, vindictive

spirit; but our blessed Lord does not say that Elias was actuated by the same spirit which He reproved in His disciples; and therefore what He says to them cannot be fairly alleged against the prophet. To vindicate his honour and to maintain the authority of the Bible as far as relates to this case, it will be sufficient to show—

I.—That the wickedness of Ahaziah and his people was extremely great, and called for some remarkable punishment.

The wickedness of Ahaziah, so great in itself, was highly aggravated by his making the people to sin. Idolatry, so great a sin in other nations, was abundantly greater in the Jews, who were under greater obligations to serve God, and to whom prophets were sent to warn of His judgments. There is, moreover, no room to doubt that Ahaziah intended to take away Elijah's life. If not, why did he send a company of soldiers to fetch him? And we may justly presume that they were not much better, who were detached upon this evil attempt. Supposing them to have been idolators, we may conclude that they went upon this expedition with pleasure. And if they who went first, were highly culpable, what daring sinners must they be who made the second attempt. If either of them secretly believed in the true God, they were guilty of a greater crime.

II.—God determined to destroy the men who were sent against the prophet, not only to secure his life, but also for other wise and good ends against His government.

That it was the will of God to destroy these men may be inferred from the presence of the angel who guarded the prophet at the time, and is evident from the nature of the infliction, for He alone could destroy them in this manner. Where many deserve death, a wise and merciful ruler will appoint them to suffer who are the most guilty; and as bad subjects are punished with death to prevent their doing further mischief, and to secure the innocent, so might the supreme Judge strike these men with death to stop the execution of their evil design. I

was also done for the security of a righteous man, whose life was in the utmost peril. Verse 15 manifestly implies that he had been in danger. Further, this was designed to confirm the mission of Elijah, and to vindicate the honour of God. It would tend to make Elijah's admonitions more regarded. It was also graciously designed to awaken the people to a consideration of their state, and it was certainly their own fault if it had not this good effect.

III.—That the prophet, knowing it was the will of God to cut off these men in this awakening manner, foretold and denounced it to them that these ends might be accomplished.

He did not pray for their destruction, but foretold it. His words may be rendered, "Fire will come down from heaven," etc.

Learn—

1. That this judgment was an act of God, and that there is nothing in it unworthy of His perfections. 2. We should not hastily censure the actions of pious men. 3. We should take care how we imitate the actions of holy men recorded in Scripture, because they did many things in virtue of extraordinary powers with which we are not invested. 4. God has never been wanting to His faithful servants. When suffering would be most for their good and His glory He has carried them through it, and when deliverance was best, He has either brought it about by unseen methods, or by an outstretched arm.—*Joseph Morris.*

SELECTED--II.

Krummacher calls this miracle "The Sermon in Fire."

I.—View Elijah as the representative and instrument of the jealousy of the Divine judge.

As the second Moses, and second founder of the broken covenant, it was his task, before all else, to bear witness, both by word and deed, to the wrath of God against anything idolatrous. As the herald of retributive justice, he is the prototype

of all the forerunners of the great and terrible day of judgment (Mal. iv. 5).

II.—View Ahaziah and his servants as the representatives of the apparent power of the apostate godless world, which seeks to oppose the Divine purpose and perseveres until its impotence is finally proved.

Such a crime as that of Ahaziah had not previously been committed by a king of Israel. So completely has all reverence abandoned him that he sends out a third band of soldiers after two have been destroyed, even when he is lying upon his deathbed.

III.—View the act of judgment as a testimony to the unchangeable justice and holiness of God.

Whoever finds it shocking will find still more shocking the prophetic declaration in Nahum i. 2-6. Anyone who is acquainted with the theocratic constitution of Israel; anyone who sees how necessary such acts were for the foundation and conservation of the knowledge and adoration of the one sole and living God; anyone who has a zeal that the name of God shall be kept holy upon the earth, will not be repelled by this action of His prophet. Elijah's calling was to be, not a fire to warm, but a consuming flame against all unrighteousness.—*Lange's Commentary.*

THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH:

"*And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*"—2 Kings ii. 11.

I.—Here is a miraculous exodus from the world expressed in figurative language.

In Psalms lxviii. 17, the angels of God are called His chariots,

probably in reference to their strength and swiftness of motion, and also because they obey the will of their King as a chariot moves in obedience to the hand of the charioteer. God is also said to make the clouds His chariot (Psa. civ. 3). In verse 12 of this chapter Elisha calls his master "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," meaning thereby doubtless that Elijah was a more real defence to Israel than the horsemen and chariots of her warriors. Moreover he was taken up to heaven in a "whirlwind," and in Psalms xviii. 10, the Divine Majesty is represented as "riding upon a cherub," as "flying upon the wings of the wind," and in Nahum i. 3, it is said "The Lord hath His way in the whirlwind." Putting these expressions beside the text, it seems most likely that the appearance there called chariots and horses of fire were angels of God appearing in shining clouds. "The vehicle," says among others J. Lange, "or the outward sign by which Elijah rose to heaven, was doubtless a cloud." "Still, as Elijah was no doubt accompanied by angels, these gave to the cloud the form of a fiery chariot and fiery horses, by virtue of the Divine power and the Divine will, so that the cloud took the form of a heavenly, triumphant chariot."—*Lange's Commentary*.

II.—The form and aspect of Elijah's removal were in harmony with his past life.

The hours immediately preceding the death of the Son of God were filled up with "signs and wonders." His actual decease moves heaven and earth and the graves of the dead. Such signs were in keeping with the death of One who had shown Himself to be the Lord of Nature. The suddenness of the prophet's removal is in keeping with his sudden abrupt appearance upon the page of sacred history. He came amongst the people of Israel with his fiery denunciations of their idolatry, as a thunder cloud rises upon the ocean and begins to send forth its lightning flashes before the mariner has time to trim his ship. It seemed fitting that the departure of one to whom had been given such dominion over nature, should be accom-

panied by a glorious natural manifestation. Even as the miracles of his life were full of teaching for men to the end of time, so his translation reveals facts concerning the unseen which will be always full of meaning to the human race. We may learn from it—

1.—That we are made for the universe, not merely for this world. During the time we spend here we find ourselves called to do certain work and find ourselves possessed of faculties adapted to perform it. Reasoning from analogy we may be sure that in another part of God's universe we shall find ourselves in possession of the powers needed to do God's work under other circumstances.

2.—Connecting Elijah's disappearance here with his reappearance on the mount of transfiguration we have a convincing proof that the saints of God retain their personal identity. Elijah was still *Elijah* when he conversed with the Son of God on the exodus which He was then about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke ix. 31).

SELECTED—I.

I.—Consider Elijah's translation as a gracious recompense of singular piety.

Not that he was perfect, but casual infirmities no more destroy the effect of general excellence, than the hills and valleys of the earth destroy its globular form. Elijah was steadfast to the true worship of God in times of peculiar degeneracy. He had to oppose *numbers*. And numbers take off the two common restraints of fear and shame, and constantly present seducing examples. He had also to oppose *superiors*, whose influence is peculiarly corrupting. He had also to oppose the established ministers of state. And God, by carrying him thus to heaven, said to a careless and depraved age—and to us also—"Them that honour me, I will honour."

II.—Consider it as an intimation of the future happiness that is reserved for the servants of God.

Facts strike the mind more powerfully than abstract reasonings. Elijah's ascension showed that there was another state of being after this life, another place of residence beside this world—that it was to be obtained by leaving the world—and that even the body was to share in it. This last was a circumstance of importance. Nothing of the kind could be enforced from nature.

III.—Consider this translation as a substitute for death.

In some such way as this, it is probable, would men have passed from earth to heaven if they had never sinned. In some such way as this will those living at the last day be qualified for glory. "We shall be changed" says Paul. This is obvious. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Elijah died not, but he was changed.—*William Jay.*

SELECTED II.

Take notice—

I.—God removes His saints to *heaven,* when their work on earth is finished.

II.—When the saints leave the world, they are carried by the *angels* to the kingdom of glory.

When Lazarus, the pious beggar, died, his soul was carried by *angels* to Abraham's bosom. Never had any prince such guard in his life-time, as Lazarus at his death.

III.—The *bodies* and souls of the saints shall be sharers in eternal life.

Enoch and Elijah are now in heaven with their glorified bodies and spirits; the translation of these saints is a type of our going thither in our complete persons.

IV.—God acts with *Divine sovereignty* in the removal of His saints.

His conduct towards them at the season of their departure is not always the same, though the admission of every saint into heaven is an act of His free love. Some are carried thither in the flames of Divine love and affection, others pass through the *valley* with fear and reluctance. —*John Farmer.*

Krummacher's representation of Elijah's translation, in which the chariots and horses of fire are taken in their literal sense :—

"The black clouds, fringed with glowing fire, burst. A gigantic gate of fire opens . . . . and out of this blazing portal there dashes forth into the air a flaming chariot and gleaming horses of fire, who spring with it to the earth as if harnessed to a pole of adamant . . . . only a few steps from the man of God ; an invisible charioteer draws up the reins, and the horses stop. . . . . Raised upon invisible hands, the prophet mounts, with joyful courage, into the blazing chariot. The horses of fire raise themselves, and swiftly as an arrow from a bow, they spring away upon the road of air, heavenwards, towards the open flame-gate of the firmament. Ha ! how it rolls away from cloud to cloud ! When the gleaming wheels touch a cloud, the thunder rolls ; where the supple steeds set down their feet, there the lightnings flash forth. . . : . They have soon flown through the atmosphere of the earth, and now the road loses itself in those regions where the mortal eye stands at the limit of its sight. Between the heavenly orbs they fly along, as it were, through a fiery ocean, past thousands of suns and stars."

ELISHA'S DIVIDING THE JORDAN.

"*And he (Elisha) took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, where is the Lord God of Elijah ? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither : and Elisha went over.*"—2 Kings ii. 14.

I.—The dividing of the waters was an answer to the question of Elisha.

The fact that the laws of nature were subject to Elisha *up to the extent of his desire* said: "God is here." The laws of nature are subject to the will of man *up to a given point;* when that point is reached, he stands powerless before them, is as an infant in their hand. Men build a massive break-water upon the most scientific principles, and its strength is deemed impregnable; we desire that it should stand for generations; but the stormy winds and waves do not wait upon our desires, and sweep away in an hour what has taken years to rear. The seaman can subject the ocean to his will up to a given point, beyond that he is as helpless as his vessel. But on this special occasion the will of the prophet was supplemented by the will of God, who showed His special presence by this special sign.

II.—The dividing of the waters shows that God holds the same special relation to the good after they have left the world as He held to them when they were in it.

God is here invoked as the Lord God of *Elijah.* He is the God of the individual man. He who has shown his sympathy with God by walking with Him here, will know Him as *his* God, in whatever part of the universe he finds himself. The parting of the Jordan in the name of the Lord God of Elijah, showed that Elijah still *was.* "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. xxii. 32). The man *is* or he could not possess God as his portion. If we speak of the father of an absent child, we necessarily imply that the child exists, though unseen. When God, in addressing Himself to Moses (Exod. iii. 6), said, "I am the God of Abraham," He implied that Abraham was still in the same relation to Him as when the patriarch sojourned in Canaan.

III.—The dividing of the waters shows that God sustains the same special relation to those of like character in both worlds.

Although God was invoked as the Lord God of Elijah, the

prayer was offered by *Elisha*, and the result proved that God was his God as well as the God of his late master. The mountain which has stood for ages in the same position, has, because of its own unchangeableness, always sustained the same relation to the objects around it. So, God's character being immutable, He has always been, and always will be, the same to men of like character. "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20) is a promise which must have been made, not to the apostles only, but to men of the same character until the end of time. It could not, otherwise, have its fulfilment, seeing that the apostles did not continue on the earth until "the end of the world." And so with most Divine promises.

SELECTED.

Notice—

I.—The invocation by which the waters were divided.

Elisha calls, not on Elijah, but on Elijah's God. He knows that his master is happy, but that he is neither omniscient nor omnipotent, therefore he expects no help from him. When our creature comforts are removed, we have a God to go to, that lives for ever. It is our duty and interest to inquire after God, as the Lord God of the saints who are gone before to heaven.

II.—The answer to the invocation.

Elisha finds himself possessed of Elijah's power. Jordan had been divided to make way for Elijah to his glory, it is now divided to make way for Elisha to his business. Those that walk in the spirit and steps of their godly, faithful predecessors, shall certainly experience the same grace that they experienced.

THE HEALING OF THE WATERS OF JERICHO.

"*And he went forth to the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters,*" *etc.*—2 Kings ii. 21, 22.

Observe—

I.—That the means here used were not adapted to the end.

God, in common with man, has exceptions to His rule of action. The rule is, that the means used by Him are seen by us to be adapted to the accomplishment of the end. We feel that the earth is manifestly fitted to the needs of man in his present condition, that the sun is so placed in the solar system as to be adapted to give the earth the exact amount of light and heat required by it. But God reveals His Almighty wisdom in a higher degree, in His ability to attain His ends when the means used are not, according to the laws of nature, adapted to their accomplishment. The means used by God to fulfil His prediction concerning the city of Jerusalem, were means adapted to the end; the Romans were better soldiers than the Jews, and their generals, at that time, were unequalled. But the overthrow of Jericho is an example of the opposite manner of His working. The former is the rule, the latter the exception. The casting of the salt into the water that was unfit to drink, belonged to the exceptions.

II.—That where means are not seen to be adapted to the end, greater faith in God is called forth than if it were otherwise.

This is, without doubt, the intention of God. Men are so prone to look at the second cause, that God sometimes works without their intervention, to bring the mind to discern and to rest in the Author of all causes. The overthrow of Jericho, without the use of the usual means, was to bring faith into exercise (Heb. xi. 30). The cure of the springs of the city,

which now stood on or near the same spot, and bore the same name, gave opportunity for the display of Elisha's faith in God

III.—That the greatness of God is especially displayed in the exercise of His power for counteracting the self-inflicted troubles of man.

The greatness of man as a sinner is shown in the power he has to injure himself and others. He can make himself less and less capable of enjoying God's earth, and is skilful at turning His blessings into curses. The barrenness of Jericho in the days of Elisha was the fruit of the disobedience of man. It seems probable that it was the fulfilment of the curse pronounced in the day of its overthrow (Josh. vi. 26). God alone can remove the curse entailed by sin.

Symbolic Teaching.

Analogy. As Elisha healed the water at its spring, so Christianity is to influence the springs of thought and feeling which colour and give flavour to the life of action. Christ insists on pure *thinking* as necessary to pure *living* (Matt. v. 28). The gospel is intended to bring "every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 5).

SELECTED—I.

I.—Howsoever natural causes may concur, heaven and earth, air and water, follow the temper of our souls.

The sins of the inhabitants were guilty of this disease in the waters, Jericho now began to be capable of a better state, since it was now become a residence of the prophets. It is reason that any place should fare the better for the presence of divines.

II.—Natural properties have no place in miraculous works.

No less easy is it for God to work by contrary, than by subordinate powers. As He will not bind His power to means, so will He, by His power, bind unlikely means to perform His will.

III.—How careful is the man of God that no part of God's glory should stick to his own fingers.

Elisha professes that he can do no more than that salt, than that cruse ; only God shall work by him, by it.

IV.—Whatever God undertakes, is already done.

He does not say "I will heal," but, "I have healed." Even so, O God, if Thou cast into the fountain of our hearts but one cruseful of the salt of Thy Spirit, we are whole ; no thought can pass between the recipe and the remedy.—*Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—There is no evil so great, but God is both able and willing to remove it.

II.—That there are no means so weak, but God can render them effectual to the desired end.

III.—There is no benefit so great, but God will confer it through the ministry of His faithful servants.

THE SCOFFERS TORN BY BEARS.

"*And there came two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.*"—2 Kings ii. 24.

Notice—

I.—The person who was really insulted by these youths.

An insult offered to an ambassador is taken as an insult offered to the monarch whose government he represents. Such an insult has sometimes been the occasion of war between the two nations concerned in it. Human kings act upon the principle set forth in the declaration of our Lord (Matt. x. 40-42). Elisha was a new ambassador of Jehovah, and the language of the youths ("Go up," etc., ver. 23) shows that they

were acquainted with his credentials. God, in letting the spirit of Elijah rest upon Elisha, had elevated him to a similar position in His service, therefore mockery of the prophet was, in reality, a mockery of his Master.

II.—The character of those by whom the insult was offered.

1. They were scoffers of God and goodness. This is the lowest condition to which men can fall on this side of perdition (Psalm i. 2; Jude 8; 2 Pet. iii. 3). 2. Their insolence was cowardly. To attack a solitary ambassador when he is doing his duty in the stronghold of the enemy is a mark of cowardice. Bethel was the centre of the idolatry then prevalent in Israel. These youths were in the midst of those who sympathised with them; Elisha was alone. 3. In ridiculing Elisha's baldness, they directly attacked God, inasmuch as it was God's doing. A man's personal appearance is not, in many respects, in his own power. To make it a subject of ridicule is at once most foolish and mean.

III.—The punishment by which the insult was visited.

They died in consequence of the displeasure of God, expressed in the curse of His prophet. His displeasure was a reflection of the Divine displeasure, because his mind was in harmony with God's mind. He "cursed them in the name of the Lord." The displeasure of even good men is harmless unless it is in harmony with the Divine mind, therefore he was only the instrument in God's hand. The bears falling upon those whom Elisha cursed and upon no other persons, and their death following immediately upon his words, are the miraculous elements in the event.

LESSONS.

I.—The reputation of one good man may be regarded by God as of more importance to the world than the lives of many bad ones. The principle is sometimes acted upon by men as

regards their fellow men. It is considered necessary sometimes to uphold the dignity of a sovereign by the sacrifice of many lives which are not of so much value to the State.

II.—Those who are most manifestly the servants of God will not escape the mockery of the scoffer.

III.—To be insulted because of our relation to God is a present assurance of son-ship (John xv. 19).

IV.—The most important element in the education of the young is the training of them in habits of reverence for sacred things and holy persons.

SELECTED—I.

I.—If our great adversary cannot make His servants suspected as hypocrites or fanatics, he derides them as weak and contemptible.

II.—God identifies the honour of His faithful servants with His own, and all contempt of them is regarded by Him as a contempt of Himself.

III.—God, in the exercise of His mighty power, can appoint at one time ravenous birds to carry sustenance to His servants, and at another, raging bears to become the instruments of His righteous displeasure.—*Krummacher.*

SELECTED—II.

A defence of Elisha's curse.

In the following discourse it is attempted to prove that Elisha is neither introduced cursing these children from a passionate temper, nor Almighty God represented gratifying a revengeful wish.

Notice—

I.—That these children derided Elisha because he was a prophet of the true God.

After Elijah was taken up to heaven, Elisha stayed three days at Jericho in his return to Bethel, where, notwithstanding that it was so infected with idolatry (1 Kings xiv. 9, 10), some of

God's prophets still remained (2 Kings ii. 3). During this time no doubt the news of his master's ascension would have reached the city, and the words "Go up" plainly make a mock at Elijah's ascension.

II.—They were not innocent little children, who were only set on by others to mock him, but young persons, who acted from the evil dispositions of their own hearts.

They were old enough to distinguish between the two religions, because they derided Elisha on account of his office. It is not reasonable to suppose that the prophet would have turned back for children who were so young, that they could have no meaning in their words and who could not have attempted to keep him out of the city.

III.—The prophet did not curse them out of revenge.

Though he had ever so much anger against them he had no power to inflict this dire calamity upon them; and since his curse would have had no effect if it had proceeded from an angry spirit, we have no just cause to suspect that he was moved by any evil passion. The prophets are said to *do* what they *predict* by Divine authority (Jer. i. 10).

IV.—That he only foretold a judgment which by the spirit of prophecy he knew was coming upon them. It is plainly said, "he cursed them in the name of the Lord."

V.—That this evil, considered as a judgment of God, was justly and wisely inflicted on these young idolators.

Among the Jews, none were at this time more worthy of punishment than the Bethelites, because their city was the fountain and metropolis of idolatry, and these young persons were undoubtedly some of the worst. The punishment was therefore *just*. It was also *wise*. The end of other punishments is to reform the offenders themselves, but the end of capital punishments is to reform others. This punishment,

fell upon the right persons in order to produce amendment in their surviving relatives.

Learn—

1. The sin and danger of making a mock at sacred things is very great. 2. Parents should be careful to educate their children in true religion. 3. Children must not follow the evil example of their parents.

SELECTED—III.

The first three miracles of Elisha.

Elisha, like his predecessor, in his first appearance is seen to be a prophet of action. These actions, however, are of a prophetical character, not insignificant workings of superhuman power, but rather "signs" and therefore testimonials (John x. 25).

1. The passage through the Jordan bears witness that the Lord opens paths for those whom He has chosen and called to be His messengers and servants (Isa. xliii. 1, 2; Psa. cxxiv. 4). 2. The act at Jericho proclaims aloud that it is the Lord who gives health (Exod. xv. 25; Psa. ciii. 3). Finally, the event at Bethel is a sign that judgment awaits the scoffers (Nah. 1, 2).—*Lange's Commentary.*

DEFEAT OF THE MOABITES.

"*And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water,*" *etc.*—2 Kings iii. 20.

Notice—

I.—The threefold preparation for this miraculous interposition.

1. The preparation of *supplication.* The kings, in their need, "inquired of the Lord" (verse 11) by means of His prophet. The act implies an application for the help of Jehovah. Preparation for the reception of special blessing by means of

supplication is a law of God's kingdom. The prayer of the leper made way for Christ's miraculous healing (Matt. viii. 2-4); the beseeching entreaty of the Syro-Phenician woman brought down the blessing she desired (Luke vii. 24-30). The "supplication" (Acts ii. 14) of the early church was the preparation for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Supplication is the placing of the wood in order upon the altar in readiness for the descent of fire from heaven. 2. The preparation of the *prophet's mind for the reception of the Divine direction.* "When the minstrel played, the hand of the Lord came upon him" (verse 15). The soul that has to bear the message of God to others needs to rise into some degree of harmony with the mind of God, to partake in some measure of the holy calm which belongs to Him. Music prepares the heart of the good man to receive, and hence to be the bearer of special help from the Divine Spirit. The gentle playing of the brook over a very rugged rock will in time render it smooth as the water itself. So will the waves of music passing over a sanctified soul. So thought Luther, and so evidently Elisha felt. 3. The preparation of *action.* "Dig ditches," etc. (verse 16). God could have made the channels as well as sent the water, but the men composing the armies could do this, and, because it *could be done*, God ordered it *to be done.*

II.—The miracle itself.

That the flowing in of the water was miraculous is evident because it came without rain, where there were no natural springs, and in fulfilment of Elisha's prophecy. In the New Testament the supernatural Divine workings are classified into "signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost" (Heb. ii. 2). These are not different *degrees*, but different *kinds* of miraculous manifestations (See Greek Testament). So the Old Testament miracles may be divided into different kinds. Some are emphatically *signs*, as the plagues of Egypt; others perhaps might be more properly called *wonders*; but any interposition above the ordinary working of natural law must

be deemed a miracle. Hence the occurrence of the narrative must be placed among them.

III.—The twofold effect of the miracle.

It was the occasion of life to one army and of death to the other. The one was brought about by the supernatural interposition, the other by a natural, though mistaken, inference. The cloud that was the help of Israel at the Red Sea, became the destruction of the Egyptians. It was not surprising that the Moabitish army, knowing how slight was the bond of union between the confederate kings, should conclude that they had quarrelled when the reflection upon the water deceived their eyes, but it is an example of the opposite way in which one work of God may be used by Him to accomplish salvation and judgment.

LESSONS.

I.—That God, sometimes, for the sake of one man's character, helps those with whose character He has no sympathy.

II.—That, though the godly can have no real fellowship with the wicked, they must sometimes be connected with them in conducting public affairs. Jehoshaphat is not rebuked for his alliance with Jehoram and the king of Edom. We may conclude that it was a political necessity (see 1 Cor. v. 10).

SELECTED—I.

Notice—

I.—The circumstances preceding the miracle.

The prophet calls for a minstrel. Who would not have expected his charge of tears and prayers rather than that of music? It was not for the ears of the kings, but for his own bosom, that Elisha called for the music. None but a quiet breast is capable of Divine revelations. But the hand of the minstrel can do nothing without the hand of the Lord.

II.—The hour at which the miracle was wrought.

At the hour of the morning sacrifice. No sooner did the

blood of that oblation gush forth, than the streams of water gushed forth from their new channels, and filled the country with refreshment. God gives respect to His own hours. If His wisdom hath set us any peculiar times, we cannot keep them without a blessing.

III.—The effect of the miracle.

It gave to the kings, not water only, but victory. Those that shall be deceived are given over to credulity: the Moabites do not inquire into the truth of the report, but, as if death would not have hastened to them, they come to challenge it.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

This salvation of the army belongs to that series of extraordinary events which have their foundation in the selection of the Israelites to be the chosen people, and which bear witness to their especial divine direction and guidance. Its immediate object was not only to confirm Elisha as prophet, but also to serve the end that all Israel, and especially its King, should perceive that Jehovah alone is God. The Lord gives beyond what we pray for, beyond what we understand; He not only saves from need and danger, but I : gives the victory besides, out of pure, undeserved grace.—*Lange's Commentary.*

THE INCREASE OF THE OIL.

"*Then he (Elisha) said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few,*" *etc.*—2 Kings iv. 3-6.

Most of the teaching suggested by the similar miracle wrought for the relief of the Sareptan widow (1 Kings xvii. 16) is equally applicable to this one, but the narrative likewise suggests—

I.—That circumstances may, for a time, seem to triumph over character.

This woman's husband had "feared the Lord" (verse 1), yet death had prevented his continuance on the earth to sustain his family. He had been a benefactor to his nation, inasmuch as he had been a moral teacher; yet his children are threatened with bondage by one of his own countrymen. A good character, though better than silver and gold, will not do instead of it. The Saviour's character was spotless; it blessed, in an especial manner, all who came under its influence; yet, if He would avoid offence, he must have silver to pay the tribute money (Matt. xvii. 24-27). The son of the prophets in our narrative had possessed a godly character, but money was wanted too, if his widow and children were to be freed from the merciless creditor. But—

II.—Though circumstances may, for a time, triumph over character, yet, in the end, character will triumph over circumstances.

The widow, by her appeal to the prophet, seems to imply that her husband's known godliness entitled her to look for Divine direction and help, and assuredly she was right. God, by His interposition, said that she was not mistaken. Sometimes the adverse surroundings of God's children seem to triumph over them for a while, but a time comes when goodness is seen to assert its superior value. There was a period in Joseph's history which seemed to say that uprightness of life was not of much account in the eyes of the Ruler of the World, but bye-and-bye the reward came. So in the case of the son of the prophet. His character was the occasion of the miracle wrought for the relief of his family.

III.—That the interposition was in accordance with the known nature of God and the needs of the woman.

Weak things in nature are ordained to lean upon the strong, and the strong are made more beautiful by becoming the supporters of the weak. The ivy clings to the oak, the chicken shelters itself beneath the wings of its mother, the child takes

hold of the strength of the man. The Lord God Almighty makes Himself known as the deliverer of the poor and needy (Psalm xii. 5; xxxv. 10, etc.). The fatherless and widows are claimed by Him as His especial pensioners. Hence, the peculiar fitness of the miracle (Deut. x. 18; Ps. lxviii. 5, etc.)

IV.—That God's working to meet human need is generally performed in secret. "Thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons" (verse 4).

The needs of man next year will be met by the results of secret working now going on beneath the earth. Nature, while the door is shut upon her, works wonders to be made manifest in due time. The needs of the human soul, also, must be met by the secret working of God in answer to secret waiting upon Him (Matt. vi. 6).

We may learn from the whole narrative—

That the only possession worth having is a godly character.

1. It is the only thing that cannot be taken from us here. 2. It is the most precious legacy to bequeath to those we leave behind. A fortune may vanish, but the "influence of the holy character lives in humanity, in some form or other, like the subtle substance of material things, which, though ever changing, never perishes, but adds to the stability, the beauty, and the grandeur of the universe."—*(N. Macleod.)* 3. It is the only property we can take with us out of the world, because it is all that we can really call our own. Here the heir to the largest inheritance and the poorest man on the earth are on a level. Character cannot be inherited, it must be acquired; hence it is a man's own. Happy is he who can say, "I brought nothing into the world, but I am going to carry something out:—a character fit to enjoy the society of the blessed God." The son of the prophets lost his life and property, he left his body and his debts behind him, but he kept his character, left its influence to bless his wife and children, and yet carried it with him to the other world.

SELECTED—I.

Learn—

I.—That the conduct of others to us makes no alteration in our duties to them.

The creditor of this woman had been heartless. "He is come," she says, "to take my two sons to be bondmen." But the debt which was owing to him must be paid, notwithstanding.

II.—That the child of God can never be so safe as in his Father's hands.

Elisha, apparently for a moment almost perplexed by such an accumulation of woes, said unto her, "What shall I do for thee?" The sufferer is wisely silent. If she had suggested a remedy, she would probably only have abridged her mercies. "Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephes. iii. 20), is the only measure by which even an apostle could describe the bounties of our God.

III.—That those of God's children who go to Him in a spirit of childlike dependence and confidence, asking *bread*, or simply a supply of this world's *necessities*, will not be sent empty away.

Rather would God maintain His servant's widow by a miracle than that she should perish with hunger. He without whom not a sparrow falleth, never will, and never can, desert the work of His own hands.

IV.—If we may legitimately gather thus much to console us as regards the things of time from the narrative, it ought not to be without its encouragement in reference to the more abiding possessions of eternity.—*Henry Blunt.*

SELECTED—II.

Our state accords, in a measure, with that of the insolvent widow, inasmuch as we are loaded with a debt which we can never discharge. But from God I do declare—

I.—That relief shall be afforded you.

God is both *able* and *willing* to relieve all who call upon Him (2 Cor. ix. 8; Col. i. 19, etc.)

II.—That if we receive not to the fullest possible extent of our necessities, it is "not in God, that we are straitened, but in ourselves" (2 Cor. vi. 12).

Beg of God, then, to make you sensible of your wants, and assign no limits to the supply which He will afford you. The widow's supply only stopped when there were no more vessels to be filled with oil.—*Charles Simeon.*

THE RAISING OF THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON.

"*And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the prophet,*' *etc.*—2 Kings iv. 21-37.

The surroundings and progress of this miracle are divisible into: *Anticipation*, *Supplication*, *Resurrection*, *Realization.*

I.—Anticipation.

If an artist produces a beautiful picture, and then prepares a frame suitable to its merits, and if by any means the picture should get unframed, it would not be unreasonable to take them to him who was the maker of both, in confident assurance that he could reunite them. So the Shunammite reasoned that her son had been called into existence by the power of God through the instrumentality of the prophet; and now that his soul and body had become disunited, she looks to the same power, through the same instrumentality, to do the *less*, as He had done the *greater*, work.

II.—Supplication.

1. The mother's. Her words were few, her modesty great (verse 28); but her whole soul was bent towards the attain-

ment of her end (verse 30). 2. The silent supplication of Elisha in the sending of his staff (verse 29). Here he evidently overrated his own power. The great honour that God had put upon him led him to over-estimate his power with heaven, and in this he shows himself a man of "like passions" (James v. 17) to ourselves. His reproof was the failure that followed his first effort. 3. The more earnest prayer and effort of the prophet. He prayed, he stretched himself upon the child, he *waited*—the most difficult part of all (verses 33, 34). Most resurrections recorded in Holy Scripture are connected with prayer, either directly or indirectly (Matt. ix. 18; John xi. 21, 22; Acts ix. 40). The great and final resurrection of all the dead is connected with the Church's constant prayer—"Thy kingdom come."

III.—Resurrection.

Three stages. 1. Flesh waxed warm. As heat is the last sign of life which leaves the body, so its return was the first intimation of returning life. 2. He sneezed, denoting returning respiration. 3. He once more opened his eyes upon the world.

IV.—Realization.

The mother received her child without the utterance of a word, so far as we know. The fuller the brook the less noise its waters make; and when it has overflowed its banks it may flow almost without a sound. So excess of joy makes us sometimes speechless. The Shunammite expressed her gratitude to Elisha by action; "she fell at his feet"—she showed her sense of God's goodness by silent worship—"she bowed herself to the ground" (verse 37).

LESSONS.

I.—Although God is the source of all life, physical and spiritual, yet He makes use of means to communicate both. The restored life was not in any of the means used by

Elisha; yet they must be used. God quickens the seed by means of second causes—rain, heat, etc.—although the life is not resident in them. So character is used by Him to communicate spiritual life; yet the life comes from Him (Eph. ii. 1).

II.—The *bestowal* of life is an argument for its *revival.* The Shunammite felt that, because her son had been in an especial manner given to her at first, she could plead for his return. This is especially an argument in relation to spiritual life. "Forsake not the work of thine own hands" (Ps. cxxxviii. 8). God is not like the Duke of Alva, who, having given some prisoners their liberty, and being afterwards petitioned by them for food, replied that he would grant them life but no food. From His gifts "we draw a plea, and ask Him still for more."

III.—We anticipate the resurrection of our dead, because we lay them in the earth, which was once the bed of our Great Prophet, who sojourned here for a little while, and slept the sleep of death, and became the first-begotten from the dead.

SELECTED—I.

Observe—

I.—This Shunammite's faith.

She had no promise to rest upon, but she had a persuasion that God was gracious, and would hear prayer on her behalf. Hence she placed the child in the prophet's bed, and hastened to him with speed. In this view the history before us is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith women received their dead raised to life again" (verse 35), and in this she approved herself a daughter of Abraham, who offered up his son, believing "that God was able to raise him up again, even from the dead" (Heb. xi. 17-19).

II.—The blessings which attended the verification of her faith.

1. Her graces were exercised and confirmed. How would it have been known that she possessed such faith and resignation, if something had not occurred to call them forth? And how could they have been so exercised, and therefore strengthened? The pruning of the vine is good because it tends to augment its fruitfulness; and the putting the vessel into the furnace is good as tending to fit it for the Master's use (John xv. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 21). 2. God's perfections were magnified and displayed. How marvellous was the condescension of God! How glorious, too, was the display of His power!

Therefore—

1. Be not hasty to judge the dispensations of Providence.
2. Be not backward to improve them.

SELECTED—II.

I.—As the staves of the men of God are powerless by themselves, so form is, in itself, but an unmeaning thing to which faith alone can impart energy.

II.—The prevailing of Elisha is not only to the honour of his prophetic mission, but to the honour of the prayer of faith.—*Krummacher.*

THE POISONOUS POTTAGE HEALED.

And Elisha came to Gilgal: and there was a dearth in the land," etc.—2 Kings iv. 38-41.

Notice here—

I.—A supernatural interposition to counteract a natural mistake.

When the Son of God was invited to the marriage feast in Cana, He found there had been a mistake on the part of the provider as to the *quantity* of wine required, and He rectified the mistake by making more. Here the mistake was not in

the *quantity*, there was enough—there was too much—there was *death* in the pot. But the mistake was in the *quality* of the food, and was such a mistake as could be rectified by supernatural intervention only.

II.—A supernatural intervention which did not take place until the very moment when it was needed. "And as they were eating," etc. (verse 40).

Man's extremity is often reached before God interposes. The wine was quite exhausted at Cana before the Saviour made more. Abraham's knife was lifted to slay his son, when the angel of Jehovah called to him (Gen. xxii. 11). Israel came to the very border of the Red Sea before the waters were divided. So here the hungry men tasted the pottage before the miracle was wrought.

III.—A supernatural intervention in which human effort was required to be put forth.

When Jesus was about to raise Lazarus, He said, "Take ye away the stone." So in the miracle at Cana, "Fill the water-pots with water." Elisha could have rendered the pottage harmless by the power of God without the meal, and the Saviour could have filled empty water-pots with wine quite as easily as those filled with water. But human effort must do what it can.

LESSONS.

I.—Mistakes made through man's ignorance can be made right by Divine power and wisdom.

II.—Sincerity of purpose and good intentions are no guarantees of the harmlessness of actions. The man who went out and gathered the wild vine and the gourds, did it with the best intentions, but nearly poisoned his brethren notwithstanding. An ignorant nurse, who gives the patient a poisonous drug instead of healing medicine may be very sincerely desirous of curing him, but may kill him notwithstanding. And as in

material things so in spiritual matters. Sincerity of purpose will not be sufficient to prevent a man from spreading abroad such teaching or from performing such actions as may be injurious to his fellow-men. There is a sincerity which kills because it is connected with ignorance of God's revelation. Such a sincerity was that of Saul before his conversion. The herbs of divinity which he had gathered worked death. He had the sincerity of the *letter*, which kills. Our Lord never taught that good intentions or sincere convictions were sufficient to make a man a blessing to others, or even to himself. "*This* is life eternal" etc. (John xvii. 3). See how He rebuked the well-intentioned reproof of Peter (Matt. xvi. 23).

III.—We ought to seek to know for what work we are qualified. The man who volunteered to gather herbs for the pottage might have been well fitted for other work; but his undertaking that for which ignorance of the nature of herbs disqualified him, had well nigh been the death of all the sons of the prophets. As the eagle is adapted for the air and the lion to roam the forest, so there is a sphere of labour in the world for which each man is adapted. When this law is not heeded, injury to the individual and to society is the result.

SELECTED.

Observe—

I. The unpromising expedient which conquered death. The meal not only rendered the pottage wholesome, but rendered that harmless which had been already eaten. The healing power of every remedy depends on this single ingredient, the blessing of God. Then a cruse of salt is sufficient to remove desolation from a whole district. Then a piece of wood can make the waters of Marah wholesome, and the anointing of clay impart sight to the blind. Thus a handful of meal sufficed to disarm death, to disappoint hell, to preserve the salt of the earth, and to sustain God's Church in the world.

II.—The faith of the prophets. They did not stumble at

the inadequacy of the means used to remedy the evil. He who despises the day of small things is not fit to build the temple of the Lord begun in humble majesty. Thus did God's servants at Gilgal experience what was afterwards expressly promised by our Lord to His followers (Mark xvi. 18).—*Adapted from Krummacher.*

THE FEEDING OF A HUNDRED WITH TWENTY LOAVES.

"*And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves*" *etc.*—2. Kings iv. 42-44.

Notice—

I.—That, from what we know of the character of God, we might have concluded beforehand, that He would interpose for His servants.

These men had given themselves to the study of the oracles of God that they might be the teachers of their fellow-countrymen. They were in need of food to sustain the lives which they had devoted to God's service. Wealthy men in the church of God are expected to help to sustain those who have mental and moral power to become preachers of the Gospel. Those who know their wealth, look at it through the glass of their character, and seek and find in them the means that is needed. So did Elisha expect help from the rich God at this time. The man of Baal-shalisha had, no doubt, given up to his ability; it was insufficient for the pressing want, and the prophet, knowing the character of the God whom he and his pupils served, looked to Him to make the little much.

II.—From the countenance thus given by God to the school of the prophets we may infer that they are of Divine institution.

There has never, perhaps, been a time in the history of God's church, when there have not been some men who have devoted themselves to the proclaiming to their fellows the message of God. Enoch and Noah were preachers of righteousness (Jude xiv. 15; 2 Peter ii. 5). When Christ ascended "he gave some . . . evangelists . . . and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, etc. . . till we all come to the unity of the faith," etc. (Ephes. iv. 11-13). The setting apart of men to this work is an ordination of God, and the miracle before us is a seal of His approval of institutions for the training of such men.

III.—The analogy and contrast between this miracle and Christ's feeding of the multitude.

There is an analogy: 1. in the small quantity of the food and the large number to be fed. 2. In both cases the miracle was wrought to meet a pressing need (Mark viii. 3). 3. In both cases exception was taken to the smallness of the quantity to afford food for so many. Elisha's servitor said, "What! should I set this before a hundred men?" Andrew asked, "What are they among so many?" (John vi. 9). 4. In both meals, out of the insufficiency came more than enough. "They did eat and left" (verse 44; John vi. 13). There is a contrast, inasmuch as Christ multiplied the loaves by a power resident in Himself, whereas the prophet did but foretell what should take place; and the quantity in the one instance bore a much larger proportion to the number to be fed, than it did in the other.

SELECTED.

Notice—

I.—The command of Elisha.

"Give unto the people that they may eat" (verse 43). This was spoken in faith, purely in God's stead. We remember that their entertainer is Almighty. We have not to learn the power of bread, but the power of Him who gives it and bestows it daily upon us.

II.—The hesitation of Gehazi.

He viewed the matter with carnal eyes, and his scruples remind us of a person who should take up a cannon ball, try how far he can hurl it, and then gravely declare to an intelligent soldier that it can never be thrown to a distance. For Gehazi had just in this manner forgotten what it was that gave energy and impulse to his Master's command.

III.—The miraculous result.

It was out of the course of nature. But it is not more incomprehensible than is the growth of the tree in the garden, or than that a single grain of wheat cast into the earth should return a hundredfold. The same creative power is displayed in the latter as in the former case.—*Adapted from Krummacher.*

THE CURE OF NAAMAN'S LEPROSY.

"*Then went he down, and dipped seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*"—2 Kings v. 14.

This narrative teaches—

I.—That there is a more equal distribution of affliction in life than is sometimes apparent.

The child who found herself a captive among strangers could but feel herself in great affliction. Yet her master, though enjoying freedom and a high social position, had a sorrow which doubtless weighed as heavily upon his spirit as her captivity did upon hers. It is necessary that every vessel which sails the ocean should carry a certain amount of ballast. Each one does not carry the same amount, but each one carries that which is necessary for its safety. There is an equal proportion. What would sink one vessel would be useless to another. So with the

trials of life; they are proportioned to the position and needs of each soul.

II.—That inequalities of social position are the means of blessing.

The vessels which require so different an amount of ballast differ greatly in the use to which they are put, and consequently in their size and build. Some are fitted to carry heavy cargoes, some for swift sailing, others for the defence of the coast, and each one contributes to the national benefit, because each kind does a work which the others could not do. Just so is it among men. The "heir of the world" (Rom. iv. 13) held a very different social position from that of Eliezer, his steward, yet the servant could do a service for his master which the master could not do for himself (Gen. xxiv.). So with Naaman and his little slave-girl; though all the advantage seemed to be with him, she was enabled to bring to his knowledge a man who conferred upon him a blessing far greater than his king could have bestowed.

III.—That the Divine Governor does not regard social position in His methods of healing.

The simple means prescribed for Naaman's cure were such as might have been used for any other person in the land. There was no elaborate ceremony observed which would have seemed to recognise his high rank. This is a type of the law of healing in general, in relation both to body and soul. The peer and the peasant must submit to the same rules of the physician if they would be restored to bodily health; and there is only the one road to moral restoration. The "ruler of the Jews" must be born again (John iii. 7), as well as the meanest subject in the kingdom of Israel. To Peter the fisherman, and to the rich young ruler, the same condition of discipleship was offered (Matt. 10-19; Luke xviii. 22 and 28).

It may be further remarked.—

I.—The *method* to be observed by Naaman is suggestive

of the ordinary ceremony enjoined in Lev. xiv. 8, 9, in connection with the cleansing from leprosy.

II.—The *means* were in symbolic keeping with the disease. The disease was external and loathsome, the remedy was of a cleansing nature and applied externally.

III.—The *manner* of the cure was in keeping with the position of the person cured. Naaman was a public man, his cure was wrought by bathing in a public place.

SELECTED—1.

I.—Notice the command of God to Naaman.

Very humble means, one would think, to compass so great an effect, but God commonly does this, for He knows we are prone to idolize the means more or less, and to forsake Him for our broken pits. It is to be noted that merely occasional and temporal commands of God bind as fully, for the present, those whom they concern, as any moral and perpetual ones do. God's commands are not to be dispensed with by our distinctions, but are unappealable, indispensable, and to be obeyed to the very letter.

II.—Notice Naaman's obedience.

His washing in Jordan was not a common act. To come out of Syria, to go to the king of Israel, to stand at Elisha's door, were his own acts; this was God's. It was the Lord's own device for the trial of his faith, and the subduing of his heart to obedience. A very short matter might else have been made of it, if the prophet had only been used to heal his body. It is evident that Naaman's acquiescence proceeded from no blind hope, as if he should say, "'Tis but trying; hit I or miss I, it is but my journey." No, but as he was strongly held back before, by self-conceit, so now he is drawn forward by a persuasion of the certainty of the promise annexed to the command. Every promise, be it what it will be, whether temporary or eternal, being from God, requires an equa

obedience and extent of faith to embrace it. The reason is plain: in every one is enclosed the power and truth of God. Naaman here was tied to a punctual closing and casting himself upon the promise, as well as we are in the more spiritual and general.

III.—Notice the reward of faith.

He was clean. No intermission of time passed between the washing and the cleansing; both went inseparably together. God's promises are always as good in the performing as in the making; and so it was here. The prophet had promised him a clean body, but he proves a clean soul also, and this was an overplus. The Lord hath marvellous high rewards for the obeyers of His commands, and therefore well may He require at our hands excellent obedience. None give such wages as He, and therefore no work should be done like His.—*Daniel Rodgers.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—A mortal malady does not necessarily subdue the heart. Naaman, the subject of a most loathsome disease, is just as haughty as the same Naaman in perfect health. Men may pass through God's hottest furnaces, and come out of its fires, like the potter's vessel, harder than they entered them.

II.—Men have, in all ages, preferred the "great things" (verse 13) of their own inventions to the simple remedy of God's revealing.

The more appalling the difficulty, the more flattering to our proud spirit is the achievement. Hence the objection to the simple method of salvation revealed in Christ. It is well to learn this great truth, that there are points in our earthly pilgrimage where Reason must be content to follow Faith blindfold.

III.—From the issue of the miracle we may learn that God's mercy, whether of providence or grace, is open to all who seek

it, and comply with the condition laid down for participation in it.—*Adapted from H. Blunt.*

SELECTED—III.

From the striking resemblance which there is between the conduct of Naaman and that of those who reject the gospel, we shall take occasion to offer a few words of advice.

I.—Bring not to the Gospel any preconceived notion of your own.

II.—Let not passion dictate in matters of religion.

III.—Be willing to take advice even from your inferiors.

IV.—Make trial of the method proposed for your salvation. —*Charles Simeon.*

GEHAZI SMITTEN WITH LEPROSY.

"*And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow*" —2 Kin gsv. 27.

The sin which led to this punishment suggests—

I.—That it is a mark of the highest contempt of the Holy God to link His name with our sinful purposes.

"As the Lord liveth," said Gehazi, "I will take somewhat of him (verse 20). To stamp base metal with the image and name of the king is regarded as a great crime against the country and the monarch. How much greater the crime of stamping upon our evil actions the name of God. Yet some of the most diabolical acts that stain the page of history have been wrought in the name of the Sinless Redeemer.

II.—That the transgression of the first table of the moral law is a step to the transgression of the second.

The man who will speak lightly of a good master will find

it an easy matter to misrepresent the character of his fellow-servant. The child who dishonours a good parent will not be likely to be a kind brother. Those who "fear not God," will as a rule "regard not men" (Luke xviii. 2). The sin against the less, comes easily after the sin against the greater. Gehazi first profaned the name of God and then wronged his earthly master.

III.—That those who will lie in order to deceive, must lie in order to conceal.

Gehazi's lie to Naaman was soon followed by another to Elisha. It has been said that "a lie has no legs." There are men in the world who have no limbs upon which they can walk, and are indebted to the artificial help of crutches to make their way in the world. So a lie must be kept up by the crutches of other lies.

The punishment for the sin teaches—

That those who sin and seek to cover it by concealment, will be compelled, in time, to be the means of its revelation.

Gehazi was compelled henceforth to be the proclaimer of his own covetousness and deception. The declaration of Christ is, that "there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed" (Matt. x. 26). His second coming will bring to light the hidden things of darkness (1 Cor. iv. 5), as one end of His Incarnation was "that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed" (Luke ii. 35). This law of God's spiritual kingdom is typified in the kingdom of nature. Many secrets which were hidden for ages from the knowledge of man have been made manifest in the later generations by the discoveries of science. So the hidden germination of the seed in darkness makes itself known above ground at the fitting season. This principle rules with regard to human character. There is to be a resurrection to condemnation as well as a resurrection unto life, and the resurrection body of each person will be an outward and visible sign of the hitherto hidden sins and hidden graces

of the earthly life, even as Gehazi's earthly body henceforth bore witness to his secret sin.

SELECTED—I.

I.—No strong dependence is to be placed, nor any high expectations built, on the advantageous circumstances in which men are placed as to spiritual instruction. Gehazi stands as a memorial of a man greatly favoured yet deplorably unprincipled.

II.—The narrative shows the awful danger of indulging a besetting sin. When a city is besieged, if the enemy can but make a breach in one place, and enter there; or if he can cause one gate to be opened to him; it may answer his purpose as effectually as if several breaches should be made, or all the gates thrown open.

III.—Let no man indulge in sin under the imagination of secrecy. Many sins take their rise from this single source, that men say in their hearts: "Thou God seest not." The swearer says with Gehazi, "As the Lord liveth;" but forgets to add with Elisha, "Before whom I stand." To God, sinner, thou canst never say after any wicked deed, "Thy servant went no whither." For well thou knowest the answer will be, "Went not My heart with thee?"

IV.—Reflect how dreadful will be the punishment of detected and unrepented sin. The leprosy of Gehazi was to survive Gehazi himself; when he died, his leprosy was not to die, but to live in his posterity after him. Thus it is said, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." The eternal leprosy of sin is the great and final curse of the wicked.—*John Fawcett, A.M.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—Vices seldom go single. One transgression opens the way to another. Gehazi disobeyed the injunction, "Thou shalt not covet," and having so done was brought under a kind

of necessity of breaking two other commandments of the decalogue. By this fraud he broke the eighth, by his false speaking he transgressed the ninth.

II.—The wages of sin are misery here, as well as death hereafter.

Gehazi flattered himself that he should obtain by his sin many advantages, "olive-yards," etc., and what did he get by it? Disquietude, detection, shame, and punishment. And the threat of the prophet shall hereafter be accomplished on all obstinate and rebellious sinners, in a sense infinitely more dreadful.—*Dean Wordsworth.*

THE RESTORATION OF THE AXE.

"*And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim.*"—2. Kings vi. 6.

It cannot be denied that the restoration of the lost axe was miraculous, if we consider: 1. That the man who lost it appealed to the prophet, and to him alone, for help in his extremity, as the only person who could help him, because he was the only person to whom it was given to exercise supernatural power. 2. That the axe came to the surface at the very spot where it was dropped. The Jordan is a rapid river, and if the axe had floated from any natural cause, it would have risen to the surface lower down the stream. 3. The means used to raise it were in no way adapted to the end in view.

The narrative suggests—

I.—That the accomplishment of the great works of the world depends very much upon keeping little things in working order.

A great victory may be lost by the snapping of the linch-pin of an artillery wheel. The sons of the prophet could not raise a house to the honour of God without the help of an axe. "Great weights hang on small wires."

II.—That what is small and what is great depends entirely upon its relation.

To many men the loss of a five-pound note would be a mere trifle, scarcely worth the mention; to millions it would be the loss of all their ability to feed and clothe their families for many days. So there were many men in Israel to whom the loss of an axe would have been nothing, but to this member of a poor community it was a misfortune so serious that it could only be remedied by a miracle.

III.—The smallest trouble which comes upon a servant of God, or upon a community of men engaged in His service, is a matter for Divine help.

The Lord God Almighty is indeed the "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. lvii. 15), yet He "considereth all the works of men (Psalm xxxiii. 15), His eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men (Jer. xxxii. 19), and He *dwells* with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit" (Isa. lvii. 15). This is sufficient to account for His interposition in the matter of the lost axe. The accident weighed upon the spirit of the godly man who had lost it, and hindered him in his work. The purpose of God's dwelling with His servants is "to revive their spirit," to cheer them in their labour, especially labour for the advancement of His kingdom. A human father delights to give his child joy by restoring to him something which he valued, and which he had lost. Why, then, should men ridicule the idea of the Good Father interposing on behalf of a community of His children? If the falling to the ground of a sparrow is noted by God (Matt. x. 29), how much more will He take account of all that concerns His servants?

SELECTED—I.

I.—There is no such thing as a *trifle* in nature where honour and probity are concerned.

Here we have the lamentation of an honest man, not because he had lost a most valuable utensil, but because he had lost what belonged to another person. When a person of ingenuous sentiments has contracted a debt, which it is afterwards out of his power to satisfy, his conscience will deliver him to the tormentor, if his creditors do not. A lesson of *social honesty* is forcibly inculcated by this miracle. The duty of the debtor is founded on the eternal laws of justice and charity.

II.—Notice the prophet's solicitude to deliver this poor honest man from the painful consequences of an unsatisfied debt.

He had already distinguished himself as the debtor's friend (2 Kings iv. 1-7), and he now does not think it unbeseeming his holy character to work a *miracle* on the spot for relief in the present difficulty. The ceremony was intended merely to excite and fix the attention of those about him, and the miracle —a temporary suspension of the laws of gravitation—was performed and recorded as an everlasting lesson to them, and to every succeeding age, of *justice*, as we have before observed, and of *mercy*, in using all means within our reach to enable the insolvent debtor to do it.—*J. Cosens, D.D.*

SELECTED—II.

You will perceive we are here in that region of human society where every new day brings with it new cares and difficulties ; where, for the smallest possessions, the resources of heaven are required ; and where, without a succession of wonders, it is scarcely possible to exist from day to day. But where is it so fully experienced that God numbers the very hairs of the heads of his people? A poor, inglorious existence, set round with thorns, yet intertwined with unfading flowers of a gracious providence.

Notice—

I.—That the order and law assigned to nature are not prison walls within which the Almighty has immured Himself. God, in the exercise of His eternal sovereignty in creation, did not relinquish the right of deviating from the common course of things as often as the particular purposes of His wisdom might demand. He who has suspended the world upon nothing, is able to sustain a piece of iron upon the surface of a stream.

II.—God does not esteem the omnipotence, which formed the universe, dishonoured by being placed at the service of His children. These men, though habited as labourers, are all kings and priests before the Lord. In the sweat of their brow, they are erecting for themselves a few poor dwellings; and yet eternal mansions of peace stand prepared for them before the throne of God.

III.—It often happens that God deprives us of a possession in order, after a longer or shorter time, to restore it to us in some surprising way, and thereby elevate it into a token of His favour.

How much must the value of the axe have been increased by the miracle. How many important services it must have subsequently rendered, how many a gloomy wood of care it may have levelled.—*Adapted from Krummacher.*

THE MIRACLES WROUGHT BY ELISHA ON HUMAN VISION.

"*And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see,*" *etc.*—2 Kings vi. 17, 18.

Notice—

I.—The occasion of these miracles.

1. The supernatural knowledge of the prophet. Such knowledge, when it does not lead to reverence, arouses hatred in the

human souls who are the subjects of it. Joseph's knowlege of the future destiny of his family gave rise to the jealousy of his brethren (Gen. xxxvii. 5-11). The knowledge of human hearts possessed by the Son of God, generated hatred in those hearts which were unwilling to submit to His rule. So in the case of Elisha and the King of Syria, the prophet's supernatural insight interfered with his plans, and therefore led him to take action against him. 2. This action was the immediate occasion of the miracle. It was obviously as foolish as it was wicked. Reflection would have showed the king that if Elisha really was in possession of his state secrets, they must be revealed to him by a superhuman power, for the exercise of which the prophet was not responsible. God therefore was the Being against whom to direct his opposition. But in this matter the Syrian king was only an example of the folly of all who, in any age, "take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed" (Psa. ii. 2). Such action must be unsuccessful. The tree that holds in its root the worm that is eating out its strength, must die, however fair its present appearance, and so it must be with every plan of man which contains in it opposition to God. See Isa. liv. 15-17, illustrated by the histories of Joseph and of Christ.

II.—The causes of the miracles.

The instrumental cause was, of course, the word of the prophet. Because of his position and character he was the means of bringing blindness upon the Syrians, and of giving supernatural vision to his servant. The sun may be the means of producing opposite effects on the human eye. Its light may give pain to the eyes of one man, while it imparts strength to those of another whose sight is strong. But the sun is only the instrumental cause. God is the first cause, while another is found in the different states of the eyes affected. So in the case before us. The increase of sight to one and the decrease of sight to others was brought about in consequence of the opposite characters of the men.

III.—The objects of the miracles.

Elisha's servant found himself surrounded by enemies, and was consequently terrified. Yet he was perfectly safe, but he would not be comforted unless he had ocular demonstration that those who were with him and his master were more than those who were with their enemies. Therefore his eyes were opened to behold the real state of things. The disciples of Christ, when in the storm, were perfectly safe, but it seemed to their senses that they were in danger of sinking. Therefore their Master, condescending to their weakness, dispelled their fear by the manifestation of a higher power. The miracle wrought here upon the young man's sight is an instance of like condescension to human weakness. He was permitted to see what a defence he really possessed. The blindness of the Syrians had its origin in the same Divine benevolence. Sometimes the healing-power of the physician can only be felt by first subjecting the patient to suffering. The infliction of blindness upon these heathen men was the first step to revealing to them the benevolent character of the God of Israel, through the kindness of His prophet. That "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel," proves that it had its desired effect.

LESSONS.

I.—That to keep men in ignorance for a benevolent end may sometimes be a duty. Sometimes men have to sail under sealed orders, and this for wise ends. The instructions are given when the proper moment arrives. It would be criminal for parents not to keep their children in ignorance of many things which may safely be revealed to them in after years. This may explain to us many of the reservations of God. "I have many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12).

II.—The strongest power among men is that which consists of goodness of character. Elisha's dealing with the Syrians was more influential than all the armies of Israel. By this

power, and not by mere physical force, God rules men and angels.

III.—When God sends darkness to a sinner it is that he may be brought into real light. This was literally the case with Saul (Acts ix. 8), and is often the case in a spiritual and moral sense.

IV.—The world of our senses conceals more than it reveals, but,

V.—In proportion to the elevation of our moral nature, the unseen will be revealed. Elisha saw more than his servant. A man on the lower deck of a vessel can see something of the ocean, one standing on the upper deck can see much more, but the man at the mast-head has the widest view. So with soul-elevation and the ordinarily unperceived realities of the spiritual world.

SELECTED—I.

In the answer of Elisha to his terrified servant, and in the miracle by which that answer was confirmed, we find the doctrine (1) of the nature and certainty of that invisible protection which the Almighty, in this life, affords to those who love and fear Him, and (2) of the number and power of those heavenly spirits, by whose agency He thus supports and protects those who fear Him. For if God is not accustomed to interfere on behalf of His servants, the presence of the angels could have been no further ground of confidence to the prophet than the height of the neighbouring mountains, and the splendour of the morning sun. Consider then,

I.—The doctrine of a particular Providence.

With good reason the great majority of rational theists, in every age and country, have agreed to recognise in the course of events around them, no other agency than the Providence of the Most High applied to particulars. There is no qualification of fatalism; the whole vast bubble bursts if we impugn it in any one particular, while if we contend for any part

of it, all moral obligation falls to the ground, and we must make our option in theology between admitting a power superior to the Almighty, or divesting Him of His noblest attributes of justice and mercy. That God is the moral as well as the physical Governor of the world has been the hope, the faith, the fear, the religion of every nation, how rude soever, by whom, under whatever name, the Almighty has been, with whatever worship, honoured. Where the idea of God is admitted at all, it is hard indeed to represent to ourselves the idea of a God indifferent to the distresses or the conduct of His creatures, and the possibility of such a divinity was conceived by Epicurus only when he had divested him of his character as Creator.

II.—The existence and number of those invisible beings by whose agency (as in the case before us) God protects or consoles his servants.

That such beings exist is consistent with the attributes of God, the analogy of His creation, and the course of His providence. That there may be countless rational creatures besides mankind, will hardly be denied by those who recollect how small a portion of the universe is occupied by man. Nor since in by far the greater part of those daily dispensations of His Providence of which we can trace the progress, and of which we ourselves are in no small degree the instruments, the wisdom or the folly of mankind are advisedly or blindly agents for the accomplishment of His will, can it be inconsistent to apprehend that the invisible things of His creation may be in like manner, administered under Himself, by beings adapted for such an office. The power of such beings might have been reasonably presumed to be great, even if we knew no more of them than their dignity, their immortality, and their invisibility. We are naturally inclined to form a reverential opinion of those who are placed comparatively so near the fountain-head of Might and Majesty. Remembering their experience of many thousand years, we can conceive the high intellectual vantage-ground on which they stand, while the very notion of an in-

visible power affects us with an impression of reverence. Scripture confirms these ideas. That their numbers are great might have been inferred from the single fact of that mighty army assembled round the hill of Dothan. But here also we have express Scripture testimony, while to the nature of their ministry, the testimonies are still more explicit and numerous.

LESSONS.

I.—Let it be impressed upon us that the eyes of such beings as these pursue us into our secret retirement, and that if we desire their vicinity and protection, it behoves us that our daily practices be such as an angel may not feel pain in witnessing.

II.—When we contemplate the unwearied activity of these high and holy spirits and their condescension to their younger brethren, let us learn the dignity of works of love and mercy.

III.—Since the number of God's faithful servants is so great, how wretched the condition of those who array themselves on the other side.—*Bishop Heber.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—Flesh and blood riseth and falleth, according to the *apparent* means.

Multitudes and outward probabilities, do both lead the confidence of natural hearts, and fix it. Naturally we see not while we see; bodily eyes discern only bodily objects; only spiritual can see the things of God.

II.—Invisible armies guard the servants of God, while they seem most forsaken of earthly aid.

Elisha does not pray that the troops might be gathered, they were there before, but that they might be seen. Those blessed spirits are ready either to rescue our bodies, or to carry out bodies up to blessedness, there is just as much comfort in either.

III.—He that prayed for the opening of his servant's eyes

to see his safeguard, prays for the blinding of his enemies that they might not see to do hurt.

He that made the senses how easily can He hold them at His pleasure. It is most just with God to entangle the plotters of wickedness in their own snare.

IV.—In doing some good to our enemies, we do most good to ourselves.

The King of Israel did by his feast what he could not have done by his sword.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

THE RAISING OF THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA.

"*Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria,*" *etc.*—2 Kings vii. 1-6.

Observe—

I.—That the promise of the coming deliverance was made by One who possessed the means of accomplishing it.

The promise of a king to furnish provisions for his household pre-supposes the possession of means to furnish the provision. A good father does not give an unconditional promise to his child unless he is conscious of ability to perform it. So when God gives a positive assurance that anything shall come to pass, we are quite certain that He has means to fulfil His word.

II.—That supernatural help was implied because the city could not be relieved in the time by any other means.

The King of Israel seems to have lacked troops or courage to attack the Syrian host, and if he had surrendered his city, there would not have been so abundant a supply of provisions by any natural means. Therefore the case demanded the inter-

vention of the miraculous. "The Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots," etc. The sounds caused by the wind are manifold, and could be used by God at any time to strike terror into those who hear them. Those who have been in a storm at sea, or have heard the howlings of the winds in the gorges of mountainous countries, will know that it would not need much imagination to hear, even in natural sounds, the noise of chariots; but whether the noise heard by the Syrians was only an intensified form of natural sounds, or was, as some suppose, produced by angelic agency, the fact that God miraculously interposed remains the same, and the promise was thus fulfilled which had been given to Israel long before (Exod. xxiii. 27).

III.—That natural means were added to the supernatural.

The natural action of the lepers supplemented the special intervention of God. Extraordinary means are not used by God where ordinary means will answer the purpose. "Take ye away the stone" said Jesus before calling Lazarus from the tomb (John xi. 39). In the one case natural action preceded the miraculous, in the other, it followed it, but both in each instance work together to accomplish the desired end.

Lessons.

I.—Blessings may be wrought for society by persons belonging to its most despised class. The lepers brought to Samaria the news of deliverance. The Galilœans were the first preachers of Christ's gospel (Acts ii. 7; see 1 Cor. i. 21).

II.—That God's mercies far exceed man's deserts. The King of Israel received the promise of deliverance when he was plotting against the life of the best subject in his kingdom (ch. vi. 31). Yet—

III.—God especially marks with displeasure those who distrust His word (verses 2 and 20). "Justly are those tantalized

with the world's promises, who think themselves tantalized with the promises of God."—*Matt. Henry.*

SELECTED—I.

Observe—

I.—What a scorn God doth put upon these presumptuous Aramites.

He will not vouchsafe to use any substantial stratagem against them; an empty sound shall scatter them. Not long before Elisha's servant saw horses and chariots, but heard none; now these Syrians hear chariots and horses, but see none. Thus the Almighty laughs at the designs of insolent men.

II.—It is a foolish and injurious infidelity, to question a possibility when we know the message to be God's.

The distrustful peer of Israel was trampled under feet, not by Israel's rudeness, but by his own unbelief. He that abased the power of God by his distrust, is abased worthily to the heels of the multitude.—*Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—This noise was not a mere empty sound. Doubtless, those mighty champions were present who stand ever armed for the protection of God's people.

II.—What happened to the Syrians in our narrative, must happen to all men. God must cause them to hear a sound, the sound of His wrath, the surges of death, the blast of that trumpet which ushers in the day of judgment.—*Krummacher.*

SELECTED—III.

I.—It is not merely the duty, but the privilege of the people of God to take God instantly at His word.

Elisha was probably as utterly ignorant of the manner in which God would fulfil His promise as the most uninformed around him, and yet he is as perfectly certain that it should come to pass as if he had seen the heavens opened, and the

golden showers of plenty descend from the everlasting garners. It is enough for him that, "Thus saith the Lord."

II.—How easy are man's impossibilities with God.

A sudden panic in the enemy's army, a sudden flight when no man pursued, and all the voluptuous plenty of an Eastern camp is at the disposal of the famished Israelites.

III.—Every threatening which has once passed the lips of God is inscribed upon the same imperishable tablets on which are engraven His mercy and His love.

If we had been asked how it would be possible most effectually to traverse the designs of the Almighty respecting the unbelieving nobleman, we should, perhaps, have selected the very means for its overthrow which God had appointed for its fulfilment. We should have said, "Place him at the gate; his rank and office will secure respect, and he shall not only see, but he shall partake of the very first load of provisions which arrives." The Almighty, also, said, "Place him at the gate," and thus fulfils his threatening against him.—*Adapted from H. Blunt.*

THE RESURRECTION AT THE TOMB OF ELISHA.

"*And it came to pass as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up upon his feet.*"—2 Kings xiii. 21.

Several views have been taken of this incident. By some it has been regarded as a mere Hebrew myth; others have supposed that there was an inherent virtue, or life-giving power, in the bones of Elisha, and that the same power exists in the bones of all men of extraordinary goodness. From this point of view it has become a corner stone of the doctrine of the

efficacy of relics. With regard to the first, the occurrence is related as a historic fact as much as any other in the Old Testament, or as much as the raising of the daughter of Jairus in the New Testament. If it is to be rejected because it is a marvel, almost all the historical books of the Bible may be set aside for the same reason. As to the second view, experience contradicts it. We will therefore accept the fact as it stands, assuming that "it was not the prophet's bones which brought the dead to life, but the Living God" (*see Lange*).

Notice therefore—

I.—That the resurrection of a dead man through the medium of the bones of another man is neither contrary to reason nor to the teaching of other parts of Scripture.

If God gave life to man at first, it is surely in His power to restore it by any means, or without any visible means, and it is not more extraordinary than the clothing of the rod of Aaron with beauty and fruitfulness, or the dividing of the Red Sea at the outstretching of the rod of Moses. The rod was the medium, but God gave the power; the prophet's bones were the medium, the life-giving power was God's.

II.—That such a miracle was in keeping with the wonderful life of the prophet Elisha.

He was a man raised up by God to do a special work. The whole of his public life was marked by miracles. As his predecessor, Elijah, had been honoured by a miraculous exodus from the earth, so it seems fitting that some similar mark of honour should be given to Elisha, either at the time of his death, or after it.

III.—The probable intention of the miracle.

It was probably intended to revive, in the mind of Israel, hope in God as to the future of the nation. Elisha, on his dying bed, had foretold the deliverance of Israel from the yoke of Syria: their present sufferings from the Moabites would naturally discourage the heart of the people and lead them to

forget the promise, which was not yet, it may be presumed, completely fulfilled. This resurrection by means of Elisha's dead body would be the means of a resurrection of hope in Elisha's God.

SUGGESTIONS.

I.—God would have the dust of departed saints remind us of their holy lives. He would have the child, when he stands by the grave of a sainted mother, call to mind her holy words and deeds; and the church or nation which has been blest with a godly and gifted teacher remember and follow the teaching which He gave them while in the flesh (Heb. xiii. 7).

II.—The dust of the godly dead may bear witness that they are still living. Its very contrast to the body when it was animated by the living soul, seems to testify to the fact that they must still be living. We speak of the body as *theirs*, thereby recognising the fact of their existence. The bones are here called Elisha's bones, *suggesting*, at least, his continued existence although disunited from his human body.

III.—God retains his relationship with His children, even with their bodies, after they have left the world. The miracle here recorded is a proof that God was still the God of Elisha, that the relationship existing between Him and the prophet was as real now as when the latter was serving Him in the land of Israel.

All this the people among whom the resurrection took place might have gathered from it; our faith in these truths ought to be so much the stronger in proportion as the evidence which we possess is more clear. Christ Himself has told us that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. xxii. 32), and His apostle has affirmed that the *body* shall live again (1 Cor. xv. 22).

SELECTED—I.

I.—The intent of the miracle.

While Elisha lived the power manifested in his works might

seem to be his. Now that he is dead, the bones can challenge nothing, but send the wandering Israelite to that Almighty agent, to whom it is all one to work by the living or the dead. And if the men of Israel were not more dead than the carcase thus buried, how could they choose but see, in this revived corpse, an emblem of their own condition? How could they but think, "If we adhere to the God of Elisha, He will raise our decayed estates, and restore our nation to its former glory?"

II.—The proof which it gave of a future resurrection.

The Sadducees had as yet no being in Israel. With what face could that heresy ever after look into the world, when before the birth of it, it was so palpably convinced, with an example of resurrection. Intermission of time, and degrees of corruption, add nothing to the impossibility of our rising. The body that is once cold in death, has no more aptitude to a re-animation than that which is mouldered into dust.—*Adapted from Bishop Hall.*

SELECTED II.

God wrought this miracle for three sacred reasons.

I.—He was willing to give Israel additional tangible proof that He, Elisha's God, was the true, living, omnipotent God, with whom it was a small thing to save, even from the dead, and whom it was therefore only requisite to have for a friend, in order no longer to fear the Moabites. "Give this God glory, fall at His feet, and confide in Him," was the first sermon which resounded from this miracle.

II.—It impressed a new and Divine seal of confirmation upon the whole of Elisha's earthly actions, for the man whom God thus honoured even in the grave, must have been a true prophet; his word, the word of God; and his advice and intimations infallible.

III.—In this miraculous act, God held up to view a mighty image of the future—of the regenerating, life-giving power

which should be shed abroad in the world by the death of Elisha's great Master, Jesus Christ.

The miracle of the prophet's grave is frequently repeated in the world, in spiritual antitypes. How often does God impress upon His servants the full credential seal only after their decease, either by removing the veil from the works of faith and love, which the spiritually fructified germ of their regenerate nature produced in deep concealment, or by permitting their words and example to operate the wonders of spiritual awakening and reanimation after their departure, for the manifestation of which they vainly waited during the whole of their lives.—*Krummacher.*

THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB'S ARMY.

"*And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.*—2 Kings xix. 35.

Notice—

I.—That this deliverance was miraculous because—

1. It was foretold with absolute certainty (verses 22, 23). Certainty is not an element in human plans. "Ye know *not* what shall be on the morrow" (Jas. iv. 14). We often read in history of succour being promised to a besieged city, and of its prevention by some unforseen mishap. The certainty with which Isaiah foretold the event shows that he had received an intimation of a special interposition from Jehovah. 2. It is described as having been wrought by direct superhuman agency. True it is that all death is from God, but He uses disease or accident as the means by which to bring about the dissolution of soul and body in almost every instance. If a man dies without any apparent cause we recognise the super-

natural in it and say, "he died by the visitation of God." So these Assyrian warriors died "by the visitation of God."

II.—That the deliverance was wrought because of the characters of three men.

1. The character of Hezekiah. If we had no other knowledge of him, his godliness would be evident from his action in his present distress. "Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it (the letter of Sennacherib) before the Lord" (verse 14). This is sufficient of itself to mark the man. But it is further recorded of him that "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel: so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (chapter xviii. 5). 2. The character of David. God says, "I will defend this city for my own sake, and for my *servant David's* sake" (verse 34). So that David's character had an influence in saving Jerusalem at this time. We know that David, in spite of many serious faults, was a man who was recognised by God as His "servant." 3. The character of Sennacherib. From his words here recorded, his pride, his daring opposition to Jehovah are revealed. Therefore the narrative most impressively bears witness—

I.—To the fact that God is influenced by human character in His government of the world. A God who would deal with His creatures without regard to their moral character would not command our reverence and love. What would be thought of a human ruler or father who acted thus?

II.—That the administration of just punishment is compatible with, is indeed a necessary phase of, the purest benevolence. The angels of God are the most benevolent, because the most perfect, of God's creatures. But they can smite the transgressor as well as succour the afflicted. The removal of the instruments of tyranny from the earth is an act of pure benevolence.

III.—That those who live morally *above* their age, will live

beyond their age. David, although an imperfect man, lived upon a higher level of goodness than most of his contemporaries, therefore he has a part in the salvation of his much-loved city long after he ceased to reign in it.

IV.—He alone can turn the afflictions of life into blessings who has learned to pray. Hezekiah's prayer had much to do with averting the catastrophe which threatened his people. The message to him from God was, "that which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard."

SELECTED—I.

Let us hold as it were an inquest on these bodies; let us inquire into the cause and circumstances of their death, that we may learn lessons which may prove of lasting profit to our souls. Evidently it is not a *natural* death. Men are not *naturally* carried off with so general a sweep as this. It was a judgment of an angry God. What were the sins which led to so tremendous an execution?

I.—One was *pride.*

God had used the haughty leader of this army as the woodman does the axe; and he that was but a tool in the Lord's hand, took the credit to himself. If God so punished the pride of an Assyrian heathen, He will surely visit it in those who know and profess better things.

II.—Another sin was *blasphemy.*

He had dared to speak of God as unable to withstand him, and had thus set his Maker at defiance. Let the swearer and blasphemer look upon these corpses, and he will see that the God who made him is not to be trifled with.

III.—Mark, again, what this proud army were about to do; you will see a further reason for the judgment which befell them. They were on the point of making an assault on those whom the Lord had taken under His protection. This is a

great guilt in His sight; for He and His are one. "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." So long as Sennacherib was warring with idolators he carried all before him, but when he threatened Mount Zion, God looked on the quarrel as his own.

See here, then—

I.—A memorable instance of *God's attention to His people's prayers.* Hezekiah on his knees was stronger than Sennacherib with his mighty army.

II.—A memorable proof *that God is faithful to His word.* Looking back in the chapter we find the Lord *promising* deliverance. The Assyrian king "should not come into the city," etc.

Here is the fulfilment—

III.—A remarkable display of *the care of God over His people.* This holy angel, who smote the Assyrian host, was, in one sense, a destroyer; but in another sense he was a *defender*, a *guardian angel.* Dreadful as this besom of destruction was to the men who were swept off by it, yet, with reference to Israel, what carefulness it manifests on the part of the Good Shepherd.—*A. Roberts.*

SELECTED—II.

The deliverance of Judah from the Assyrians is one of the greatest and most important events of the Old Testament history of redemption, as we may infer from the fact that it is narrated with such careful detail, and that we have no less than three accounts of it. How deep an impression the event made upon the minds of the people, and what great significance was ascribed to it, is shown by its express mention in the late apocryphal books. It is also generally admitted that the noble Psalm xlvi. refers to this event, if not also Psalms lxxv. and lxxvi. Assyria stood at the summit of its power under Sennacherib. Besides the nations of Eastern (Central) Asia, it had subjugated Phoenicia, Syria, and the ten tribes. It was just ready to subjugate Egypt. Having invaded Judah, which

was already tributary, the conqueror had already devastated the country and captured the strongholds. Only Jerusalem now remained. Its destruction appeared inevitable. But just at this point the power which had hitherto been resistless was broken. A change took place in the affairs of Judah. It was, from this time on, to represent alone the ancient covenant of the Jewish people. The great act of deliverance here recorded stands at the commencement of this new era as a new covenant sign. This was the significance of an event which had had no parallel since the deliverance from Egypt.—*Lange.*

THE GOING BACK OF THE SHADOW UPON THE DIAL OF AHAZ.

"*And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord: and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.*"—2 Kings xx. 11.

The man who, after reading the story of Christ's changing water into wine, should endeavour to explain the manner in which the change was brought about, would find himself in a hopeless difficulty. Any explanation would only throw another veil over the *how* of the Divine operation. A purely supernatural operation cannot be explained by natural methods. The growth of the grape, and the process of fermentation cannot be brought forward to form a basis upon which to found a theory of the way in which the Lord performed His miracle. So with the incident before us. Men have tried to explain, by natural laws, how God brought back the shadow on the sundial. But in this, as in all other miracles, the *how* is hidden from us, the results alone are seen. As surely as "it is not *for* us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" (Acts i. 7), so it is not *in* us to know the method of the Divine operations in those supernatural acts

of God which we call miracles. All that can be said upon the matter is, that God, by His power, caused the shadow to go back, and that He did this to give comfort to the king of a people who were accustomed to receive signs from Heaven.

Notice—

I.—The antecedent circumstances of the miracle.

1. The announcement of death. "Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die" (ver. 1). 2. The supplication for a reversal of the Divine sentence. "Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech Thee, O Lord," etc. (ver. 2). 3. The promise of a lengthening of life and the prescription of means of recovery. "I will add unto thy days fifteen years," etc. (ver. 6, 7). 4. The felt insufficiency of the bare promise and the means prescribed. "Hezekiah said, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me?" (ver. 8).

II.—That the miracle was needed because Hezekiah's faith was weak.

It is said of God's law that it is "weak through the flesh" (Rom. viii. 4), *i.e.*, that it is powerless to keep a man from transgression because of his moral weakness. So we may say of God's promise here. Though it was the word of the Living God, it was weak through the weakness of Hezekiah's faith. therefore—

III.—The Miracle was in keeping with the Divine gentleness.

God is set forth as the "gentle leader" (Isa. xl. 11) of the weak members of His flock, and this is a beautiful illustration of it. A man weakened by severe illness needs to be tenderly dealt with. His nurse or physician may assure him that he will recover, yet his weakness may render him unable to obtain comfort from the assurance. If it were possible for him to receive from them some *sign* that their words would come true, we can feel that they would not quarrel with his incredulity, but grant him any sign which he should choose and they could

give, to strengthen his belief in their words. So God dealt with this king. His want of faith probably arose in part from physical weakness, and God, who "knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. ciii. 14), so far condescended to his frailty as to permit him, not only to receive a miraculous sign, but to choose what it should be.

Lessons.

I.—That when one indication of the Divine favour is insufficient to recover lost confidence in Him, it is allowable to ask for another. If a sick man feels that one pillow is not enough to give his head rest, he tells his nurse, and she gives him another. If a man cannot walk with one crutch, his surgeon will let him have a second, unless there is good reason why it should not be so. So does the Divine Father deal with His children. Moses had lost confidence in God and himself when God appeared to him in Midian. Although God told him that he was to deliver Israel, he could not lay hold of it, until God gave him a sign and yet another, that He would be with him (see Exod. iii. and iv). So with Hezekiah here. God answered his prayers and thereby showed that it was an allowable request.

II.—That bodily health is no indication of God's favour, nor sickness any proof of His displeasure. If we were to make the temporal condition of men a rule by which to judge of their relations to God and His law, we should repeat the mistake of bygone ages which He has Himself sternly rebuked (Job xlii. 7, 9). The king of Judah was one of the best men of his time; he was so great a favourite with God that he could venture to ask favour after favour, yet he is smitten with sickness.

III.—That sometimes God commands those to leave the world whom we think are most needed in it. We feel that the best place for a physician is among his patients; we cannot conceive that he can be so useful anywhere else. Yet sometimes the message comes to him in the midst of his humane

work. "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die." And so with the successful minister, the devoted missionary! It seemed as if there were no place in God's universe where Hezekiah was so much needed as in the land of Judah, where there had been such a dearth of good kings; yet to him the summons came. The Divine administration seems to be against the good of the world sometimes, but only *seems*. If you were to take a king's sceptre into your hand, and thrust it into a running stream, it would appear crooked, but this would be because you look at it through the medium of the water. The sceptre is only crooked to the human eye, it is straight to the human reason, and reason holds its way against human vision, and says, "the sceptre is *straight*, though it appears *crooked*." So sometimes God's sceptre appears to us to be a crooked sceptre, but this is when we look at it through the medium of our own notions. Through this medium it often seems as if "the ways of the Lord were not equal" (Ezek. xviii. 25), but faith ought to hold its own against appearance, and we ought to be able to say, "The sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre" (Psalm xlv. 6). "Clouds and darkness are round about Him;" this is the medium which makes the straight appear crooked, but "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne" (Psalm xcvii. 2). To silence reason on this matter, consider Job. xxxviii. and xxxix. to xli. To stimulate and strengthen faith in God's character, and therefore in His government, remember the declaration of His Son and our Saviour, "O *righteous* Father" (John xvii. 25).

SELECTED.

The analogy of this miraculous sign.

There could hardly be a more significant one than that present on the shadow-measurer, that is, the time-measurer, which was "arranged in the court of the palace before the king's windows" (*Thenius*). Every human life is like a day—it has its morning, its noon, and its evening (Eccles. xi. 6; xii. 1, 2; Job xi. 17; Matt. xx. 3). The advance of the shadow shows

the approach of evening, which will be followed by darkness and night. Hezekiah's life-day was on the decline; the night of death was approaching; then it was promised him that this day should stand once more at its noon, that the shadow of death should recede, and that the evening should once more become mid-day.—*Lange.*

JONAH'S PRESERVATION.

"*Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*"—Jonah i. 17.

In this incident we have:

I.—An ordinary event in the providence of God.

It was not a miracle that a large fish should swallow Jonah. Instances have been known in which sharks have swallowed men. "Oken mentions that in the year 1758, a sailor fell overboard from a frigate into the Mediterranean Sea, and was immediately taken into the jaws of a sea-dog (carcharias) and disappeared. A gun was discharged at the shark, the ball struck it, so that it vomited up the man who was alive and very little hurt" *(Keil and Delitzsch).*

II.—What may be called a special providence of God.

A remarkable coincidence of ordinary providences leading to some important result, we generally regard as a *special* providence. Such was the meeting of Abraham's servant with Rebekah, and of the disciples of Jesus with the "goodman" who was to furnish them with a room in which to prepare the passover (Luke xxii. 10, 11). That the fish should have been at the place at which Jonah was thrown overboard at that very moment, was a special providence of God, brought about by Him to work out a special purpose.

III.—We have a miraculous Providence of God.

That the prophet should have *lived* in the fish was a miracle. A man could live three days without food under favourable circumstances, but that life should have been continued to a man enclosed within the body of a fish is altogether out of the reach of ordinary possibilities. The miracle is the more striking because consciousness continued. Men sometimes live under very unfavourable conditions in an unconscious state, but Jonah not only lived, but thought, and reasoned, and *prayed*. From the event we may learn—

I.—That there is no way out of a plain duty except through severe chastisement.

II.—That the *place* of prayer can neither add to, nor take from, the value of prayer. The body of the fish was a temple to God when prayer ascended to Him from it.

III.—The inferior creatures may become instruments of moral instruction to man.

IV.—That the fish was honoured by being thus brought into the plan of God for Jonah's recovery to the way of duty.

Symbolic teaching suggested by the words of Christ (Matt. xii. 39-41).

1. The sign of Jonah is placed side by side with His death and resurrection, and may therefore be regarded as prophetic of it. But there is a strong contrast, inasmuch as the humiliation of Jonah was the result of disobedience, and that of the Saviour of the most perfect obedience.

SELECTED—I.

Consider—

I.—The object and design of the miracle.

Its first object was to demonstrate the power of the God of Israel over the gods of the idolators, and to prove to them, by a peculiar act of power over their dumb idols, that He was the God of the whole earth, and not the God of Israel only.

Joppa was a city of the Philistines, whose principal idol was Dagon, who was represented under the form of a *large fish*, and was supposed to be the protector of all who sailed the ocean. When the fish cast Jonah forth upon the dry land, the idolators would behold the form of the god they worshipped approaching their coast, and a living man cast forth from its mouth. The repentant Jonah would tell of his preservation by Jehovah, the mariners would confirm his report, and there can be little doubt that the effect of the miracle would be great. (Note.—That Jonah was ejected at Joppa seems very credible from the well-attested fact that the enormous bones of a sea-monster were long preserved and venerated there. Pliny mentions the circumstance, and says that the bones were exhibited at Rome by M. Scaurus in his Ædileship). The second object was of a more general nature—to prove the certainty of the resurrection from the dead, by so remarkable a representation of the recovery of a man from the grave. It demonstrated to that and to all succeeding ages that the God of Israel was the Lord of the spirits of all men; that, as He could preserve the life of the prophet when he went down into the moving, living grave which He had prepared for him, so He could preserve the spirits of men when their bodies are committed to the grave.—*G. Townsend, M.A.*

SELECTED—II.

The justice and mercy of God run together in this history, as those that run for mastery in a race. And it was hard for Jonah to discern whether His justice will overcome His mercy, or His mercy triumph over His justice. Jonah's death now seemeth to have the first place, yet mercy speedeth herself to the rescue.

Notice—

I.—The disposer and ruler of the action. "The Lord."

Not the greediness or appetite of the fish brought him to his prey, but the Lord. In the whole of this history, whatever befell Jonah is ascribed to the Lord Himself, and is thus lifted above the sphere of ordinary things.

II.—The manner of doing it. "The Lord prepared."

The fish came here by special providence. If this is not sufficient to answer all objections, I will say no more but that which Augustine saith—"*The very creation of the world showeth a greater miracle than whatsoever in these or the like singularities seemeth most incredible.*"

III.—The instrument. "A great fish."

In Job the incomparable power of God is set forth in His creation of leviathan. In the open sea many monsters live, and I will not inquire whether this creature was specially created for the purpose or no, but pass on:

IV.—To the end of its preparation. "To swallow up Jonah."

Not the body of Jonah forsaken of the soul, but the living man, living, moving, feeling, meditating.

V.—The time during which Jonah continued there. "Three days and three nights."

Who could have supposed that Jonah could have survived this? But to God no time is unseasonable, no place unmeet, no danger uncouth, or unaccustomed to His strong deliverances.—*John King.*

SHADRACH, MESHECH AND ABEDNEGO IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

"*And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace,*" *etc.*—Dan. iii. 23-27.

Consider—

I.—That superior knowledge may endanger a man's temporal position.

In the days of great scientific ignorance, superior knowledge

of the laws of nature endangered the lives of men whose shoe-latchets their persecutors were not worthy to unloose. Galileo was immured in the dungeons of the Inquisition because he knew and taught that the earth moved round the sun. The early believers in Christ had to pay a high price for their superior knowledge. And so it has been many times since in the history of the church. The knowledge possessed by these three Hebrew youths of the law and character of Jehovah endangered, not only their social standing, but their lives. They had heard a voice saying, "Thou shalt not bow down to the likeness of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath" (Exod. xx. 4, 5), and, although they were acquainted with Nebuchadnezzar's law and with his character, and knew the consequence of disobedience, the Higher Law of the King of Kings brought them into the furnace.

II.—The deliverance wrought on their behalf.

1. The human frame is, naturally, fuel for fire. The bodies of ten thousand martyrs have been thus reduced to ashes. But the bodies of these men were not so reduced, nor were they pained or injured. Not only so, but their very raiment remained unsinged, retaining not so much as the smell of fire. This deliverance was therefore miraculous. 2. The witnesses of the miracle were those who wished to prevent such a deliverance—their accusers, who were in all probability actuated by a feeling of envy at their promotion in the kingdom (verses 8-12), and the king, who, full of fury against them, had commanded the furnace to be heated "one seven times hotter that it was wont to be heated" (verse 19). 3. They were honoured with an addition to their number. One "like unto the Son of God" walked with them in the fire. Thus they were not merely saved from bodily death, but they were saved with special marks of honour—were "more than conquerors."

III.—The teachings of the miracle.

1.—Those only who live above the world can afford to leave

it or to lose it. The man who has temporal blessings without fellowship with God cannot afford to disobey the world's laws or customs. But those who have God for their portion can afford to forfeit property and even life, because they have a better inheritance. "They declare plainly that they seek a country" (Heb. xi. 14).

II.—The means taken to extinguish truth will be used to extend its influence. The Phillippian jailer, not content with having beaten his prisoners, thrust them into the inner prison, yet into this prison he shall come, and falling upon his knees, shall beseech help from his prisoners. The very means taken in that city by the magistrates to silence Paul and Silas led to their being more highly esteemed, and consequently to the words which they had spoken receiving more attention. No such decree in favour of the worship of the true God would have been issued by Nebuchadnezzar (verse 29) if these young men had not been thus accused (Isa. liv. 11-17).

III.—One special interposition of Providence in a life-time will not guarantee exemption from an ordinary fate at another period. Peter was saved from Herod's sword, but he suffered martyrdom in later life. So remarkable an instance of triumph over the ordinary laws of nature as that vouchsafed to these three youths might have almost led us to expect an exemption from the ordinary lot of mortals afterwards, but we have no reason to suppose that such was the case.

IV.—The servants of God who have been publicly condemned shall be publicly vindicated. The Son of God was publicly condemned and executed as a malefactor by the Jews, but they will one day own him as their Lord with "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him" (Isa. xxv. 9).

SELECTED—I.

The stamp of approval which God set upon the conduct of these men teaches us—

I.—That there is a limit to the obedience which God requires us to render to the civil magistrate.

Is it to be supposed that governments have no duties and subjects no rights? The reply is that, however strong be the injunctions of Scripture in such passages as 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14, etc., that the authority of rulers ceases to be binding whenever it is opposed to the revealed will of God. And we derive this rule, not so much from positive injunctions as—1. From examples of such men as those before us, and from the conduct of other servants of God. See the conduct and words of Peter and John (Acts iv. 19; v. 29). 2. From the obvious tendency of the Holy Scriptures, which teaches that no human authority can be allowed to come in competition with the authority of God.

II.—That we must not only admit this limitation, but we must contend for it.

The Hebrew youths were willing to sacrifice their lives rather than bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image. And yet a simple outward compliance would have sufficed. But they reckoned not their lives dear unto them, in the vindication of their faith in the only True and Living God. In this they were the forerunners of thousands of faithful witnesses in later ages, who, by very slight concessions, might have been spared the martyr's death.

III.—That there is no situation, although apparently desperate, from which God cannot *deliver* His people.

It is no greater effort of Divine power to *quench the violence of fire* than to interpose on the most common occasions; but what condition could *apparently* be more hopeless than the condition of these youths, cast bound into the fire? It *might* have pleased God to ordain that His servants should *not* be cast into the fire; it *did* please Him that the flames should pass harmless over them, and that they should walk unhurt in the midst of it.

IV.—That there is no situation, of danger or of trial, in which God's servants may not experience the *comfort of* heavenly communications.

"The form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (ver. 25). Nebuchadnezzar perhaps hardly knew the force and meaning of his own words; but other parts of the Old Testament will justify us in understanding them according to their literal sense, and in concluding that this fourth person was the Eternal Son thus visibly manifesting His care for His servants. Could they be destitute of comfort while such a Presence was with them? Or was there in all the provinces of the empire a post of honour which could have imparted to them any satisfaction comparable to that which they derived from such holy communion? —*Adapted from W. Dealtry.*

SELECTED--II.

The miracle by which these devoted Jews were rescued from the flames, and the monarch of half the earth diverted from his ill purpose would be but ill understood and unduly valued, if we saw nothing in the event beyond the liberation of three innocent men, and the manifestation of the power of God among the heathen. The fate of the whole nation of Israel was then at issue—the whole volume of prophecy was then weighed in the balance! When God removed His chosen people out of His sight for their transgressions, we must remember that the removal was not *for ever.* After a certain period, fixed by prophecy, they were to return to their own land. But in order that they might thus return, it was necessary that, even in bondage, they should continue to be His people. No false God was to be in them; there was to be no bowing of the knee to Baal. Yet His people are now, and are for years to continue, in the very midst of temptation, surrounded on all sides by idolatry, and the slaves of a despotic king who has made an irrevocable decree, that *all* peoples shall fall down and worship his golden image, or be cast into a fiery furnace! It does not seem possible that any human power can now save

the Jews from idolatry or destruction. Had the rest of the nation been as firm as these three holy men, a decree like that of Ahasuerus would doubtless have gone forth "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey" (Esther iii. 13). But when man's help is vain, it is then the the mercies of the Lord are greatest; now it was that H "wrought for His name's sake, that it might not be polluted in the sight of the heathen among whom they were." He "delivered His servants that trusted in Him," and a decree is therefore issued which no human foresight could have looked for, granting to the Jews the full and free exercise of their religion. From this important event therefore till the end of the period of the captivity, the Jews are permitted to remain God's peculiar people in the midst of a land of idolators and strangers —and we may remark that a similar attempt to restrain Daniel in the worship of his God was frustrated in an equally miraculous manner—so that when the term of their captivity had expired, there are found more than forty thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to idolatry, nor forgotten the God of their fathers.—*R. Parkinson, M.A.*

DANIEL'S DELIVERANCE FROM THE LIONS.

"*My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me.*"—Daniel vi. 22.

Consider—

I.—The antecedents of Daniel's miraculous deliverance.

1. They remind us that the penalty of greatness is the envy of inferiors. Those who have good eyesight do not feel pain when the light of the sun shines upon them. But the man whose vision is weak feels distressed when the rays of the "ruler of the day" fall upon him. The pain tells him that he has diseased eyes. But God cannot remove the sun from the heavens on that account. Daniel was the sun in the Persian

kingdom, showing to all who came under his influence what a good ruler really was. But the intense light of his character was too strong for men whose conduct he thus condemned and who were thus made painfully conscious of their own shortcomings. "Who is able to stand before envy"? (Prov. xxvii. 4). 2. That envy will seek an opportunity of false accusation. Those who live near a volcano must not be surprised if the latent fire finds vent, and when the flames do burst forth, they must expect to feel the effect of the outbreak. So with those who are the subjects of envy. The fire will find its way to the tongue, and, if there is power to put the desires into actions, they will suffer from that which "is set on fire of hell" (Jas. iii. 6). It was the envy of the Jewish rulers which was the foundation of their false accusation against Christ (Matt. xxvii. 18)—an envy born of the dark shadow into which they were thrown by his perfect life. And their envy caused them to charge him with rebellion against Cæsar, even as the Persian rulers here charge Daniel with rebellion against Darius, although it is most likely that he was the most faithful servant which that king ever had. In the days of Papal intolerance, it was a custom in Spain before taking the martyrs to the stake, to clothe them in garments covered with painted devils in order to degrade them in the eyes of their fellow-citizens, and make them "as the filth of the earth" (1 Cor. iv. 13). So envy oftentimes does for the characters of its victims. Daniel must be thus dressed in the garment of a rebel before Darius could be brought to condemn him. 3. They remind us that it may be the penalty of moral greatness to be condemned by legal greatness. The law of a nation may be a very strong law because of its great antiquity, but it may be a very wicked law notwithstanding, and whoever obeys it may bring himself under the penalty of a much more powerful and a much older law, the law of moral rectitude—a law older than the creation of man. So it was with Daniel, envy overcame for a time moral greatness, and the penalty was condemnation to a violent and terrible death.

II.—The miracle itself.

The supernatural interposition of God is seen in the fact that the lions did not act according to the instincts of their nature. It is a law of the animal kingdom, that creatures of the same kind always possess the same instincts, and continue from age to age invariably to follow them. Whenever this is not the case, there is evidence that some higher law is at work which over-rules the ordinary law, and there are several instances of this in Scripture. In the case of ravens bringing meat to Elijah, we have instinct held back by a more powerful law, and by a law that it is not in the power of man to set in motion, except as the special instrument of God. In the case before us we have the powerful instincts of one of the most ferocious beasts of prey held back, and the man of God remains with them as unmolested as if he had been in a fold of lambs. This holding back of the appetite of the lions is the more remarkable, because the instinct returned as soon as Daniel's persecutors took his place in the den. The instrument of the deliverance was "the angel of God." The original condition of man in Eden was not one of subjection by fear to any wild beast. They were there under his power as much as the most insignificant insect. But sin took away man's dominion, and he "became subject to vanity," and this vanity consists in part of his loss of power to rule the entire animal creation. But the angel whom the lions obeyed had not thus lost any of the gifts with which he had been originally endowed, and his very goodness gave him the needed authority over the beasts of prey—an authority which it is inconceivable that man would have lost if he were now in his original condition. Christ was forty days in the wilderness with the wild beasts without suffering harm (Mark i. 13). (On this subject refer to remarks on the miraculous feeding of Elijah.)

LESSONS

I.—That the most pressing demands of business are not incompatible with daily waiting upon God in prayer. The reaper

who has so much corn to lay low before he can obtain a sufficient wage, never thinks the time lost in which he straightens his bent back, and whets his scythe. He knows that this will not hinder, but help him. Nobody is in greater haste than the driver of an express train, yet he never grudges the time consumed in oiling the wheels of his engine. Daniel must have been a very busy man, but he did not consider that waiting upon his God delayed the king's business. "Prayer and provender hinder no man" (*Luther*). "They who wait upon the Lord . . . *run*" (Isa. xl.).

II.—Escape from trial of our constancy at one time is no guarantee that we shall not be called upon to prove it at another. The regiment which has not yet been called into dangerous service is most likely being reserved for the next battle. Daniel escaped the fiery furnace, but he was thrown into the den of lions.

III.—That sometimes disobedience to man is the highest virtue in the sight of God. When man's laws are in opposition to God's, the breaking of them is righteousness. We ought to obey God rather than man (Acts v. 29).

IV.—That we are in the path of safety when we are in the path of obedience to God, even though the obedience leads to death. "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. x. 39). "Whosoever does not permit himself to be driven by persecution and danger, either from the upright fear of God, nor, on the other hand, from lawful obedience to earthly authorities, shall find at last that honour and glory follow upon fidelity" (1 Samuel xxiv. 11, 21).—*Starke.*

EXPOSITORY OUTLINES

ON THE

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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THE PARABLE OF JOTHAM.

"*The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king*," etc.—Judges ix. 8-15.

In considering this parable notice—

I.—Its intention and success.

When William Penn was carrying on negotiations with the Indians he was accustomed to gain their respect and attention, by exhibiting to them his skill as a swordsman. This was an acquirement which the red man could appreciate, and Penn's display of ability in this matter was often the means of disarming prejudice, and of gaining the ear of his auditors for moral teaching. So Jotham here clothes the truths he wishes to utter in the form of parable, and gains the attention of the men of Shechem by his skilful use of imagery. The power of his discourse is manifested in the fact that his hearers were held to listen to his words, and thus to see, as in a mirror, a reflection of their own criminal folly. It was so far successful, that it chained the attention of the auditors even through the *application*, but it seems to have been limited to this.

It did not issue, as in the case of Nathan's skilfully drawn

picture, in any real repentance of the deed of wickedness, nor did it result even in the Shechemites being led to pass sentence upon themselves without knowing it, as David did when he saw his crime reflected in a similar glass, or as was sometimes the case when our Lord uttered His parables. (See Matt. xxi. 41.)

Eloquence often chains the ears of men while they are listening, but does not change their purposes. We are told that Fox could carry with him the entire House of Commons while he was delivering his marvellous orations, but that his eloquence made little or no difference in the numbers who voted for and against the motion under consideration. As soon as he had concluded, his opponents returned to the views they had held before he spoke, though while he was speaking, they looked at the subject with his eyes. So although the hearers of Jotham were gained to listen to one whose blood they would have shed, they suffered Abimelech to rule them for three years (verse 22).

II.—The contents of the parable.

In it we have the national life of Israel set forth under the similitude of the natural life of the tree. In the kingdom of trees we notice :—1. The *individuality* of each tree. The life of each is distinct from every other, it derives its sustenance from the soil in which it stands, and, by the exercise of its own functions, imbibes that which is congenial to its own nature and is thereby enabled to bring forth its pre-ordained leaf and fruit. 2. The *diversities* of size, and form, and worth, found among them. Some trees are much more highly valued by men than others in proportion as they excel in height, or girth, in beauty, or in usefulness. Each tree differs from every other, yet each has a glory of its own, and each one contributes to the beauty and the strength of the whole. 3. The manifest *dependence* of some trees upon others. There are giants among them whose shadow is needed to shelter the weaker ones from the intense heat of the sun, or from the fury of the storm ; trees which are

the recognised protectors of others unable to grow and flourish without such aid. So it was in the kingdom of Israel, and so it has been in all national communities since, and so it must ever be. There was the *individual life* which God had given to each man who was placed by Him in conditions which were favourable to his moral development, and in which he might become in some degree a tree of righteousness (see Psa. i. 3; Isa. lxi. 3). Then there were *distinctions* among them, diversities of social position and of mental endowments, all tending to the growth and consolidation of the national greatness. So that the similitude of Jotham is most apt. But in Israel, as in every other nation, there was a feeling that there was, or there ought to be, some who could be a shelter to the others, some who possessed the ruling power. It is a law recognised in the kingdom of men as in the kingdom of nature, that those who are not born to rule or to lead must seek those who are, and must take shelter beneath their protecting shadow. This similitude is carried to perfection in the book of Daniel. "The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven and the sight thereof to all the earth; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of heaven had their habitation; it is *thou*, O king, that art grown and become strong; for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth" (Dan. iv., 20, 22). It is used also in Isaiah. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment, and a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest (Isa. xxxii. 1). There was in Israel at this time the instinctive feeling of the need of a ruler, though the chosen ruler was a bad man because the character of those who chose him was bad. The parable goes on to represent the trees most fitted to rule as refusing that honour. Each tree mentioned possessed some property which rendered it peculiarly valuable to the people of the East. The

olive-tree was very valuable to them. Its oil was an article of food, and supplied them with the means of artificial light. It formed an ingredient in the Jewish meat-offering. Its fruit is eaten, and its wood valuable for building (1 Kings vi. 23, 31, 32). Its leaves are symbols of peace. The fig tree was also highly prized. Its well-known fruit formed an important article of diet, its wide-spreading branches made a grateful shelter. The fruit of the vine has always been held in high estimation in every land, especially in those where the heat renders it peculiarly refreshing. It was doubtless a great source of wealth to the people of Palestine, which country was famed for its immense clusters of grapes (Num. xiii. 23). "To sit under one's own vine and fig tree" was a proverbial expression which denoted peace and prosperity (Mic. iv. 4, etc.). These trees were regarded as kings of the vegetable world because they furnished sustenance and comfort, and were the means of prosperity to the inhabitants of the land in which they grew, and they are represented by Jotham as refusing to be transplanted to a soil in which only a bramble could flourish, because they would then degenerate and be unable to bring forth that fruit which was their glory. The bramble, which can flourish in any soil, but which produces no fruit of any value, whose shadow is useless as a means of shelter, whose wood can only be used for fuel, is the only tree which will be anointed king.

III.—The teaching which underlies it.

The parable implies that there were men in Israel at this time who possessed the qualifications necessary to a good ruler set forth in the excellencies peculiar to the trees mentioned. There were those in whom might be found the intellectual and moral greatness which would meet the nation's need, and which were symbolised in the fatness of the olive, the sweetness of the fig, the refreshing juice of the grape. But these men, the most fitted to rule, refused to do so because there is no honour in ruling where excellence is held in dishonour. They were in the soil of private life, which was congenial to

their nature, and to be transplanted to a soil in which only a *bramble* could flourish, would be to lose their power of imparting light and sweetness. The nation, the city, or the congregation in which a bramble is held in estimation is not the soil in which to plant an olive-tree, a vine, or a fig-tree. The application of the whole is, that when worthless men are chosen to rule by those who cannot appreciate excellence, the choice of the one and the consent of the other are earnests of destruction to both. The bramble cannot give food, or shelter, or light, but it can become fuel for fire, and this would be the end of Abimelech and of those who thought to find in him a ruler suited to their needs. The fire "coming out" of the bramble possibly refers to the fact that fire is often originated among dry bushes by the friction of the branches, thus forming an apt emblem of the war of passions which often destroys combinations of wicked men.

Lessons.

I.—That the honour of a leader depends, not upon the fact that he *is chosen* to rule, but upon *who chooses* him.

II.—That it is the man who gives honour to the position, and not the position which gives honour to the man. The reverse of this follows as a matter of course; the most lowly and obscure station cannot lessen true dignity.

III.—That, in choosing a position in the world, we should be most solicitous to obtain that which will be favourable to the development of our character, and that in which character will be appreciated.

IV.—The ruler of a nation is a mirror in which is reflected the character of the people. The choice of the people, or the consent which they give to the rule which is over them, is a revelation of their character. A straw on a stream will tell which way the water is flowing, and a man's choice reveals his

inclinations, and these proclaim his character. The Shechemites chose a murderer as their king, one who was the murderer of seventy men, and these his own brothers, and the fact of their making such a choice showed that they were like-minded. The *choice* of men keeps in operation the law expressed by our Lord, "For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested, neither was anything kept secret but that it should come abroad" (Mark iv. 22).

V.—That the true leaders of men have resources *within* for *themselves*, and therefore for *others*. Such men can afford to remain in obscurity, their mind is to them a kingdom, they are their own society. The olive-tree rejoiced in its own fatness, the vine and fig-tree in their sweetness, by which they were able to supply the wants of men without being transplanted to another and a less congenial soil.

SELECTED—I.

By the trees seeking a king was meant the inconstancy of the Shechemites, who could not be content with God's government—governing them, as He had done, by *many*, and raising them up a Judge in their trouble to deliver them; but they would be governed by *one*, and have a king (even as sometime after the whole nation of the Jews did follow them, in 1 Samuel viii.), contrary to that which God had appointed. Which conduct of theirs teacheth us that we soon grow weary of God's yoke, and of His ordinances, by obeying the which we might do well, if we could see, and loth are we that God should reign over us. We say, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," but who admitteth it?

The other sons of Gideon are compared with Abimelech, as the good trees are with the bramble. And yet they who were more excellent than he would not reign, much less should Abimelech, who was far worse, and yet he did. By Gideon's other sons, who would not reign, though they might, and the trees, who would not leave their state for a higher, nor their

sweetness for any other, all of us are taught to keep compass, and to frame ourselves willingly to abide in the estate wherein God hath set us, and not to break out of our range and compass to affect that which is not for us. And as gifts are required thereto, and calling, so we should attend thereupon and employ our time upon that for which we are fitted; yea, and look to find most sweetness therein. We may further learn by the answer which is supposed to have been made by the trees—viz., that they did so contentedly rest in the estate in which God had set them—that God hath done much for us, to whom He hath given a sweet contentment to rest and abide in our callings.

By Abimelech and the bramble, which sought that for which they were utterly unfit, let us mark that where ambition is, it makes the unworthy to take upon them that which the worthy will utterly refuse. That which a grey and godly man dares not do in the ministry, every youth and bold fellow dares for his own preferment. But, O bramble, where is thy sweetness? Do men gather grapes of thorns? Is this thy feeding, thy watching, thy planting? Is this to cheer the heart of God and good men? If thou wert an olive, a vine, or a fig-tree (though not so fruitful), there were help for thee, by cutting, digging, or removing; but being a bramble, who shall make thee fruitful?

By the denunciation of Jotham against the Shechemites, we see that all rejoice in their doings according to what they are, but durable and sound joy which God alloweth, nay, commandeth (Deut. xxviii. etc.), cometh only from well-doing and a good conscience. And we gather, that though good and bad both meet together, and both seem to be merry in the company which suits them, yet there is a greater difference between them than a man would imagine. The ungodly man's mirth is in the tongue and countenance; the godly man's is of the heart, and therefore lasteth.—*Richard Rogers.*

SELECTED—II.

The word translated "rule over" signifies to float about, and includes the idea of restlessness and insecurity. Wherever the Lord does not found the monarchy, or the king himself does not lay the foundations of his government in the grace of God, he is never anything but a tree, moving about above other trees without a firm root in a fruitful soil, utterly unable to bear fruit to the glory of God and the good of men. The words of the briar, "Trust in my shadow," contain a deep irony, the truth of which the Shechemites were very soon to discover.—*Keil and Delitzsch.*

THE PARABLE OF NATHAN.

"*And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor,*" *etc.*—2 Samuel xii. 1-4

The darkest deeds of human life have sometimes been the occasion of the brightest displays of human genius. Such characters as Macbeth and Richard III. were the means of bringing out the wonderful powers of Shakspeare. The iniquity of the Jewish nation, revealed in the condemnation of the Saviour, furnished a subject for the genius of Doré and the masters of art in bygone ages. Only master minds can depict the depths of crime in their true colours either by word-painting or on canvas. The crime of David was a very black one, and needed an inspired hand to set it forth, but the man to whom the task was assigned proved himself fully capable of picturing David's deep transgression. There is no parable of the Old Testament that can be compared with that of "the ewe lamb." Its skill in concealing its real application reminds us of our Lord's parable of the vineyard and the wicked husbandmen

(Mark xii. 1-12), and in practical application to the heart and conscience it never has been surpassed. A long line is needed to sound the depths of the deep sea, and enable men to register the number of fathoms down to the ocean's bed, and the power of genius is needed—in the case before us of inspired genius—to sound the depths of sin and place it before the mind in its true light. This Nathan was able to do in relation to the sin of David. The introduction to the parable must not be overlooked, for in it we are taught that *the first step to repentance springs from the Divine favour.* "The Lord sent Nathan." The man who has fallen into a pit and broken his limbs must have help from without. It is useless for him to talk of climbing out unaided, somebody must come and lift him out and place him again upon the spot from which he fell. The first step towards recovery must come from *above* him. David had fallen, by his own wilfulness, into a horrible pit; his moral backbone was broken (Psa. li. 8), and he was sinking deeper and deeper into the mire. He must have help from God if he is to recover, in any degree, his lost position; and the first step which God takes to help him is the sending of Nathan to be the means of convincing him of the greatness of his guilt. The wisdom of God is seen in choosing as His messenger one who had formerly been the bearer of good tidings to David. Nathan had been the mouth-piece of God's goodwill to David and his house "for a good while to come" (2 Samuel vii. 1-19). It is also probable that Nathan, who was evidently in David's confidence, had in the past informed the king of deeds of injustice committed by his rich subjects against their poorer brethren. All this would be calculated to disarm the culprit's suspicion, and would lead him to listen attentively to the prophet's words. Moreover, David had been a prophet himself, he would therefore estimate at their true value the words of a fellow-prophet, as a physician would give especial heed to the judgment of one in his own profession, of whose ability he would be more competent than to form a just estimate. Whatever of the spirit of a prophet

remained in David would own the authority of Nathan as the messenger of God. In all this adaptation of means, we note the wisdom and gracious favour of God in making the first advance towards the restoration of David, and feel how truly he could sing, "He restoreth my soul, He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (Psalm xxiii. 3; xl. 2.)

In considering the parable itself, notice:

I.—The analogy and contrast which it sets forth as existing between David and Uriah.

1. The *analogy.* The men in the parable were on an equality; in some respects they were fellow-men and fellow-citizens. "There were two men in one city." So David and Uriah, although one was a king and the other a subject, were on a level on the common ground of humanity, and were both subject to the laws, political, social, and religious, which had been given by God to the nation which regarded Jerusalem as the seat of government. Men who live in a city are expected to frame their lives more in accordance with law than barbarous and nomadic tribes who dwell far from such centres of civilization, and the citizens of the "city of the great King" (Psa. xlviii. 2) were especially bound, by their great privileges, to honour the laws of their Divine Ruler. David was by birth a member of the highly-favoured nation to whom God had given laws, and Uriah, by choice, was a citizen of the city where dwelt David the king, who, more than any other man, was bound to obey the law of his nation and of his God. There is analogy in their *qualities.* They were both courageous, valiant men. David had, from his youth, been noted for this characteristic; from his shepherd-day when he slew the lion and the bear, up to the present time his bravery had been unquestioned. Uriah the Hittite was a man of like spirit in this respect, and his very bravery had been used by his master to compass his death. It was well known to David that if

Uriah was placed in the fore-front of the battle he would hold his post or die.

2. The parable also sets forth the *contrast* in the two men—"the one rich and the other poor." Wealth means power to gratify one's desires, to execute one's will. Poverty means the necessity of submission to those above us in the social scale, even if they are beneath us in other respects. So it was with Uriah and David. The king's position made it possible for him to indulge his unlawful desires without hindrance. The position of Uriah obliged him to submit to his master's will. This inequality aggravated David's crime. The parable seems to hint at a further contrast. "The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb." David had many wives; the narrative implies that Uriah had but one. His love was therefore deeper, because purer, than that of David. His strong affection was an emotion to which the king was a comparative stranger, even as the rich man in the parable could not estimate his poor neighbour's affection for his only lamb. For the lawless passion of David cannot be placed upon a level with the pure love of Uriah. The one is life and the other death. The river which keeps within its channel is a blessing to the country through which it flows; but the same river, when it bursts its banks and overflows the land, becomes a means of desolation and destruction. So is it with lawful affection, and lawless passion.

Notice—

II.—The effect of the parable and its application upon David.

1. It awakened strong emotion: "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man" (verse 5). This effect was the result of looking at the crime from a distance. It was so placed before the criminal that he was enabled to see it in its true light, stripped of any palliation which he might have urged to excuse it if he had seen that it was his own. 2. It revealed

great self-ignorance. The knowledge most indispensable in life is *self-knowledge;* a man who does not possess this is an ignorant man, whatever are his other acquirements. Knowledge is said to be power, and the knowledge of oneself is the greatest power. David was a poet, a musician, a statesman, and a general, but his inability to recognise his own likeness in the picture set before him shows that he was an ignorant man in the matter in which ignorance is most fatal. 3. But the effect of the application of the parable is a remarkable illustration of the power of conscience. Some men do everything upon a large scale. Their emotions are deep, their sins are great, and so are their virtues. The captain of a vessel of large dimensions which carries a rich cargo, has a heavier weight of responsibility than he has who has only the charge of a small craft. If he pilot the vessel safely into harbour he has the more honour, but if she gets wrecked the disaster makes a deeper impression. David was a man of great abilities and capacities. His crimes and his virtues were great, his desires after goodness and his sorrow for sin were intense. The contrition of spirit which Nathan's application of the parable brought forth is an evidence that the power of conscience was strong in David after all. He now passes condemnation upon himself as unreservedly as he had before passed sentence, as he supposed, upon another, and we have ample evidence that his sorrow was deep and lasting.

III.—The effect of David's confession upon God.

"The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die" (verse 13).

Confession of sin to a human friend against whom we have offended will often bring an assurance of forgiveness. The good parent makes it indispensable before the child is restored to its position and favour. So is it in the government of God. "*If we confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (John i. 9). The penalty laid down by God for David's crime was

death by stoning, but the lawgiver has the power to remit the penalty, and it was done in this case on account, doubtless, of David's deep realization of the heinousness of his guilt. The crime unconfessed would have led to soul-death; when this was averted, the bodily life was granted.

Lessons.

I.—The path of duty is the path that "leads not into temptation." If David had been at the head of his army at this time it is likely that he would have escaped this dark stain upon his life. Plenty of work is a preventive of certain kinds of sin. A brook is kept pure while it is in motion, but if its waters were to be stopped from flowing, they would become stagnant.

II.—That tendencies to sin, though not on the surface, are yet latent in the depths of the heart. To the eye of a stranger a powder-vessel may look very trim and clean and safe, but the black powder is there in the hold, only needing a single spark to make its awful power felt.

III.—Impurities in the springs of thought will be revealed in the streams of action.

IV.—Although sin is forgiven, some of its consequences must remain. "The Lord hath put away thy sin," but "the sword shall never depart from thine house."

SELECTED.

The parable, and the fact that gave rise to it, lead us to observe—

I.—That impartial reason is ever ready to condemn any flagrant iniquity. There is as discernible a difference between good and evil as between white and black, when nothing interposes to obstruct the sight, or misrepresent the object. When a particular case happens to be entangled with something

of nicety, there may be room for doubt, or need of consideration, but in general men can pass judgment readily and boldly. David wanted not the wisdom of an angel to discern what common sense would have dictated to any indifferent person in a like case. But—

II.—The prejudices of interest and lust may, and do hinder men from discerning, or at least distinguishing in practice between right and wrong, even in the plainest cases. Such was most apparently the case with David. There was no room for comparison between two injuries of a size so unequal. He who was so tenderly sensible of what the poor man was supposed to suffer, in having his ewe-lamb made a dish at his rich neighbour's table could not possibly be ignorant of how much the injured Uriah must have suffered. In the heat of his indignation against a supposed oppressor, he put on the severity of a judge, more rigorous than the law directed, for he doomed the offender to death, besides the legal penalty of a four-fold restitution. And this when he had been guilty of a cruelty which left not the possibility of restitution.

III.—Although men do sometimes suffer themselves to commit gross sins, in open contradiction to their own inward light, yet all notorious iniquity stands condemned by the universal verdict of mankind. It is no easy matter to bribe the reason and warp the judgment so far as to make men advocate their own irregularities; and let sinners once sit in judgment on each other, and they will all come in condemnation in their turns, and all with equal justice. While the affections are unengaged and temptation at a distance, nature recoils at the very thought of a great enormity (see 2 Kings viii. 13). It is probable had David been foretold by Nathan how he would act in the matter of Uriah he would have answered him in the words of Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?"—*R. Moss, D.D., Dean of Ely.*

THE PARABLE OF THE WOMAN OF TEKOA.

"*And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead,*" *etc.*—2 Sam. xiv. 5-20.

The contrast between this parable and the one preceding it is very great. The parable of the ewe-lamb was spoken by a prophet inspired by God. This one was spoken by a theatrical person at the instigation of a man of the world, one who, though thoroughly unprincipled, could read human character and discern human motives through a very small crevice. The parable of Nathan was the introduction to a scorching reproof of David's iniquity, the parable of the Tekoan is full of fulsome flattery. The one is founded on the principles of truth and justice, and was spoken under a deep sense of the importance of the subject to which it related; the other has in it no trace of real feeling, though there is much theatrical sentimentality, and is a mingling of truth and falsehood, of false reasoning about God and wrong conclusions drawn from it. The prophet's parable was uttered to induce repentance in David; this one had for its end only the promotion of Joab's schemes of self-interest.

Notice—

I. The Argument of the parable.

1. That those who grant mercy abroad should first begin at home. The first reason which the woman urges why David should forgive his son, is the willingness with which he would have forgiven hers. A king who is merciful to his subjects is inconsistent with himself if he is not forgiving towards the members of his own family. 2. That enmity ought to die before those who are at enmity die. "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (verse 14). If Absalom were to die before a reconciliation had taken place, the father's heart would be deeply grieved; and if he himself were to die before his son's return

to favour, he would go down to his grave mourning the estrangement. A most powerful argument with David, we can well believe, whose "heart was toward Absalom" (verse 1), although it was founded upon the supposition that it was simply a feeling of displeasure which prevented the king from permitting his son to return, whereas it was probably a sense of duty and of justice. 3. The Divine Father's example in relation to *His* "banished ones." David's sin, and God's consequent displeasure, must have been known to Joab, if not to the speaker. He knew how bitter had been his master's sense of banishment from the favour of the great King, and how he had been admitted again to friendship with God; and he knew, too, what weight this thought would have with David, although he ignores the fact that Divine forgiveness had been granted only after confession of the sin. Thus the argument increases in force as it continues.

II.—Its immediate and remote results.

The immediate result was the recall of Absalom without outward reconciliation. "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face" (verse 24). Evils arose from this half-measure. Joab was disappointed, and Absalom was irritated. It was more trying to be a prisoner in the city where his father was king, than to be banished altogether, and this may have had much to do with his subsequent rebellion. His message to his father was reasonable. "Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still; now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me" (verse 32). This demand led to the more remote consequences of the parable, viz., his full restoration to favour without any acknowledgment of the crime of which he had been guilty, thus giving ample opportunity for the completion of the conspiracy which had probably been already formed.

Lessons and Suggestions.

I.—That the most worthless characters sometimes have the best pleaders. We find this the case occasionally in our law courts. Men with no character, but lacking nothing else, with money and influence in abundance, can have the benefit of the most skilful barristers to bring them out of the grip of the law. Absalom was a thoroughly bad man, yet he had many friends, and, in this case, had probably a person to plead on his behalf more likely to gain her point than any other person in the kingdom. Joab was a native of Bethlehem, Tekoa was a village about five miles distant, therefore he most likely was well acquainted with this "wise woman's" skill and address.

II.—That imaginary narratives of human life have most influence when they find a counterpart in our own experience. The power of a story may be very great even when it contains nothing in it that has any likeness to anything that has happened to ourselves. But its attraction is far greater when we see in it a reflection of passages in our own life. The players in Hamlet might have interested all the spectators who witnessed their performance, but none were so deeply moved as the king and queen, who saw in what was acted before them a reproduction of their own crimes. So the feigned story of the Woman of Tekoa was listened to by David with especial interest, because it had its parallel in his own history.

III.—That those who are conscious of having committed great sins are not fit to deal with other offenders. The sin of David included the crimes of both his sons, and the consciousness of this made him weak in purpose, and unsteady in his dealings with them. If he had punished Ammon as he deserved, he would have had no need to banish Absalom, but he felt bitterly conscious that his sons were but treading in his own steps. A man smitten with paralysis is not a fit person to administer corporal punishment to another.

IV.—To restore to favour unconditionally is a sin against the person forgiven. The prodigal, whom the father welcomed back, returned with "Father I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight;" this showed that he could be restored to his old place in his father's home with benefit to himself as well as to others. "*If we confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (John i. 9). "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; *if he repent*, forgive him" (Luke xvii. 3).

SELECTED.

There was no real resemblance between the *fictitious* and the *real* case. The murder of which Absalom had been guilty was not the result of sudden anger, but was long premeditated: nor was he the only son of David, by whose death his name and family would be extinct. But David could not, or would not, distinguish between them, being already pre-disposed to grant what the woman was endeavouring circuitously to obtain. The argument was false and foolish. She represented the uncertainty of life; that Ammon might have been cut off as prematurely by accident; that, at any rate, no punishment inflicted on Absalom would restore his brother. But the Divine Law required the death of the wilful murderer; and though it is true that the shedding of blood cannot benefit the dead, yet it operates as a safe-guard to the living. The woman also pleaded the mercy of God, both general and particular; as if she would intimate that, because God had spared Absalom, David was called upon to exercise the same forbearance; but this, too, was a delusion, and a dangerous perversion of God's moral government. What God may suffer to be done with impunity, in the course of His Providence, is no rule for the regulation of *man's* conduct. For the day of Divine retribution is yet to come. However, the weakness of this woman's arguments found a strong advocate in David's breast. She seemed perfectly sensible where her strength lay, and therefore

very highly flattered him for his wisdom and discernment at a time when his conduct indicated the very reverse.

I.—We may learn, from David's example, to be be more guarded and watchful over all our feelings and affections—even such as are, in their proper degree, essential to a religious character. The danger is, when the feelings are in themselves unquestionably right, and only become wrong when they are carried to excess and when they lead us to transgress God's commands.

II.—The Tekoan woman noticed a Divine truth of the utmost importance, although she mis-applied it and perverted it to a bad purpose. "God hath not taken away his life: He also deviseth means that his banished should not be expelled from Him." God does not take instant vengeance, but "waits to be gracious." Not satisfied with forbearance, "He has devised means" to bring back His banished ones. This was the case under the *Law.* It is the case still more fully under the *Gospel.—Henry Lindsay.*

THE PARABLE OF THE WOUNDED PROPHET.

"*And as the King passed by, he cried unto the King: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle: and, behold, a man turned aside and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man; if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.*"—1 Kings, xx. 39, 40.

Observe—

I.—The very remarkable condition necessary to this parable.

"A certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the Word of the Lord, Smite me, I pray thee" (verse 35). This parable belongs to that class of which we find so many examples in the prophetical writings where parabolic *action* accompanies the words. (See Jer. xxvii. 2; Ezek. xii. 7, &c.) Hence the demand of the prophet to his fellow-prophet, which, if it had not been uttered "in the word of the Lord," would have seemed the request of a madman, and would have been most rightly refused. But the penalty inflicted on the man who would not obey the prophet's command, proves beyond a doubt that the demand "was accompanied with a statement of the reason, and an appeal to the word of Jehovah." (See *Lange.*) The conditions upon which depend great moral issues seem sometimes very mysterious when considered by themselves, but when a command is clearly proved to have the stamp of Divine authority, men cannot disobey it without paying the penalty. There are commands given by men to their fellow-men, in which those who have to obey cannot see a step beyond the command, yet they yield a ready, though blind, obedience, and are praised for so doing. This is especially the case in relation to parents and children, and in cases where one man from his position either of body or mind is able to *see farther* than those whom he commands. It was necessary not only that the application of this parable should be hidden from the man for whom it was intended, but that the very person who spoke it should not be recognised. Hence the disguise (ver. 38). In fishing it is necessary to adapt our methods to the kind of fish to be caught. Some fish will bite even if they see the hook, for others it must be most carefully concealed by the bait, while some are too wary to be caught unless the angler entirely conceals his person. When Nathan came to reprove David, he knew that he should be listened to by the king who would honour him for his calling as God's prophet, and therefore he had only to hide the hook. But Ahab had no such respect for the messengers of Jehovah, and so even the man must be concealed in order to

bring this disobedient king to pass a sentence of condemnation upon himself.

II.—The signification of the parable.

It is not very clear in all its details, but "so much is indisputable, that the young man who had gone out into the battle is the representative of Ahab, and the man entrusted to his keeping, but allowed to escape through carelessness is the representative of Benhadad." "Israel had just endured a hard, bloody fight, and had carried off the promised victory; but now, in the person of Benhadad, it had let the arch-enemy, whom God had given into their hands, go free and unpunished." (*Lange.*) It is especially to be noted that as the man in the parable is represented as having a prisoner entrusted to his care by another, so Benhadad had been given into Ahab's hand by God *as His* prisoner. God was captain, Ahab only keeper.

LESSONS.

I.—The overthrow of kings and rulers proceeds from the Divine hand, and is often necessary for the preservation of those whom they rule.

If the human brain is diseased, it matters not how healthy every other organ of the body is, the whole man is a sufferer from a malady to which, if unchecked, only death can bring relief. If the heads of the body politic are guilty of great crimes, both the rulers and the ruled are on the road to ruin. God, in the person of Christ, is "the Prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev. i. 5). By Him "kings reign" (Prov. viii. 15), and "He ruleth in the kingdom of men, and appointeth over it whomsoever He will" (Dan. v. 21).

II.—That when God gives men power over others, it is at their peril if they do not use it according to to His will. We have instances in which men have been delivered up to their conqueror for correction and not for destruction, and when this limit has been passed, judgment has been pronounced

upon the conqueror for overstepping the bounds appointed by God. (See Jer. l. 7-11, etc.) But in other cases, in which the character is so bad that chastisement is useless, God will have his sentence executed. (See 1 Sam. xv.) For man to deliver where God condemns is to affect to be more merciful than God. To question the decision of a human judge is to cast a doubt upon either his ability or his character. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Shall one criminal reverse the sentence of another with impunity?

III.—Weakness of purpose and lack of character may be mistaken for generosity. A man who uses money for the benefit of others which has been entrusted to his care by his master, is not *generous*, but *dishonest*. God gave Ahab place and power to use in His service; to employ them for other purposes was to rob God.

IV.—Those who are displeased at the truth of God are on the high road to ruin. The sentence which Ahab passed upon the man of God was soon executed upon himself. Those who reject the remedy which would heal their disease must not complain if they have to suffer from the consequences. The truth is intended to lead to repentance. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psa. xix.), but it must be obeyed.

V.—Those who are ruled by the Word of God will sometimes have to suffer temporal pain for obeying it. The servant of God will sometimes find himself, like the prophet who spoke the parable, wounded "by" or "in the Word of the Lord."

SELECTED—I.

The narrative itself is not here made the subject of discourse. It is accommodated and it seems to challenge accommodation—to the representation of certain great truths, which suggest themselves in the perusal of it. Three things present themselves for consideration.

I.—The man who turned aside from the battle.

The mention of a conflict naturally leads the Christian's thoughts to the spiritual powers with whom he is called to contend. And no sooner does the spiritual warfare present itself to his mind, than he immediately adverts to Him whose triumph in that warfare is the earnest and assurance of ours. Immediately after His Baptism, He entered upon a tremendous conflict with the powers of evil, which was protracted with more or less of intense fury, until His triumph was finally sealed in the Cross. I need not say that He spoiled principalities and powers and took from the Evil One all the armour wherein he trusted. Behold, then, the man who turned aside from the battle—even the Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation.

II.—The solemn charge which the man who turned aside from the battle made to the prophet. "He brought a man unto him and said, Keep this man."

No hero enters into a toilsome and painful conflict causelessly. No hero designs to spend his strength for nought and in vain. So the Divine Hero. His gracious design was that the prey might be taken from the mighty and the lawful captive delivered. It is no fiction that a great treasure, a blood-bought treasure, is entrusted to each one of us—that we each hold in charge an immortal soul, for the rescue of which from the powers of evil a boundless Ransom has been paid.

III.—The manner in which the charge given to the prophet was neglected. "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

True representation of the loss of many a soul—as thy servant was giving attention to other matters, as my eye was pursuing other objects and diverting itself with the outskirts of the battle, marking the gay attire of this gallant officer, admiring the noble action of that courser which dashed by me into the fray—now noting the dancing of the pennons—

and now wandering to its utmost reach over a forest of plumes —as my eye was thus engaged, the thought of my charge was recalled to me by seeing again the hero who entrusted me with it emerge once more from the fray, and approach the spot where I was standing, but the man has effected his escape —he is gone. Oftentimes He who brought and entrusted to us the soul cometh to claim His prize, in a day when we look not for Him, and what an agony to mark His approach when we know that we have neglected the charge.—*Dean Goulburn.*

THE PARABLE OF JEHOASH.

"*Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah, king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trod down the thistle.*"—2 Kings, xiv. 9.

I.—Three things led to the utterance of this short parable.

1. A relative success.
2. An under-estimate of a superior.
3. An insolent challenge.

(1.) Success is a relative term, and must be estimated with reference to the circumstances accompanying it. A man who guides his vessel safely across the English Channel achieves a certain success. But this is a short and comparatively easy voyage, and is not to be placed by the side of a successful crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, in rough and stormy weather. The captain who can bring his vessel safely through the dangers to be encountered in such a voyage, has fairly earned the right to be called successful. It by no means follows that the man who could execute the first would be equal to the

second, nor does it follow that a military commander who could defeat the tribes of Africa in battle would be able to gain a victory over the armies of Europe. But this was the conclusion at which Amaziah, king of Judah, had arrived. He had subdued the Edomites and slain ten thousand men, and he therefore concluded that he should be equally successful against the king and armies of Israel, who were much more formidable foes. This conclusion arose from—

(2.) An under-estimate of his superiors in the art of war. The man who undertakes to swim a river ought to be well acquainted with the strength of the current in comparison with his own bodily strength. A mistake on these points may be fatal. It is plain that Amaziah undervalued the military strength and capacity of his opponent; for when they did meet, "Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to their tents" (verse 12). This undervalue of a man who was a greater warrior than himself led to (3) an insolent challenge. "Come, let us look one another in the face" (verse 8). Success in an undertaking sometimes fills an ignorant man with such an insolent pride, that he thinks nothing can stand before him. Amaziah was such a man, because he had defeated the Edomites, he thought that the army of Israel would be but as chaff before him. Hence his invitation to Jehoash.

II.—The parable by which Jehoash reproved him conveys that king's sense of his superiority by a similitude drawn from nature.

The contrast between the cedar standing in all its glory upon the mountain of Lebanon and the worthless thistle which has sprung up at its foot is very great, and conveys the king of Israel's contempt for his rival in forcible terms. The cedar of a thousand years could not be uprooted or removed by the strongest earthly power, while the thistle of yesterday was at the mercy of the first beast of the forest who passed by that way. There is also a reference to Oriental custom. The man

who asked the daughter of another in marriage was expected to be his equal in rank, otherwise the request was regarded as an insult. Therefore the proposal of the thistle to the cedar is a declaration of supposed equality, and is placed by Jehoash on a level with Ahaziah's challenge to himself. The fate of the thistle sets forth what would be the result of the self-esteem of the king of Judah if he did not take the advice which is the application of the whole, "Tarry at home, for why shouldest thou meddle to thine hurt" (verse 10).

III.—Note the success and the non-success of the parable.

It was a success inasmuch as it was a true picture of the character of the man whom it was intended to represent. If those who can give a correct outline of the face upon canvas are regarded as successful artists, those whose word-painting can show us the features of the soul are at least as successful. But it failed in producing a beneficial effect upon the person to whom it was addressed. Amaziah did not wish to see his own likeness. Those who are deformed do not derive pleasure from seeing themselves reflected in a faithful mirror. The parables of Christ often failed to gain the approbation of his hearers on this account.

LESSONS.

I. One proud man may become, in the providence of God, the means of humiliation to another. There was much arrogance in the man who compared himself to a cedar as well as in him whom he reproved.

II.—Men who are prone to seek quarrels will find that in so doing, they have sought their own ruin. Nations and rulers who enter into war from ambitious motives, will but hasten their own destruction. "With what measure ye meet, it shall be measured unto you again."

III.—He that has achieved a fair measure of success by the

exercise of a fair measure of ability may lose what he has gained by attempting a task beyond his capabilities. A gambler who has won a fortune in a contest with a man no more clever than himself will most likely lose it all if he attempts to play with a much more skilful gamester. It would have been Amaziah's wisdom to have been content with his conquest of Edom; he would then have been spared the humiliation of a defeat at the hands of the king of Israel.

IV.—Those who become proud and insolent by prosperity turn a blessing into a curse, and thus defeat the Divine intention. Success in our undertakings is intended to produce gratitude and humility; the fault is in us if these effects are not produced.

V.—The great lesson of the history is that "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. xvi. 18).

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

"*Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard,*" *&c.*—Isaiah v. 1-7.

Parabolic teaching is sometimes prophetic teaching. What is uttered under the form of parable is a foretelling of events of history which have yet to come to pass. As the time of their fulfilment draws nigh, the meaning of what was obscure grows plainer, the outline becomes filled up, until the complete development of that which was foretold enables us to understand clearly all that was wrapped up in the parable. The parable of the vineyard and the husbandman spoken by our Lord, which in some details is remarkably like this one in Isaiah (See Matt. xxi. 33), contains a prophecy of the fate of the Jewish nation, which is being even now fulfilled. Although

at the time "the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that He spake of them," they had no conception of what Christ meant when He brought them to pass upon themselves the sentence: "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen which shall render unto him the fruits in their season" (verse 41). But when Jerusalem was overthrown, the prophecy began to grow clear, and its full meaning is now very apparent. In the parable before us we have a prophecy of the coming chastisement of the Jewish nation by the Assyrians and the army of Nebuchadnezzar, the details of which are given more fully in chapters vii. and viii. Yet the full meaning of the parable could not be apprehended until the events foretold had become facts of history. The moral teaching it contains applies to the Church in all the ages. From it we learn:

I.—That sin converts what is sacred and peculiar into what is common: "He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof . . . I will take away the hedge thereof," etc.

The fence, the hedge, or the wall taken from around the vineyard soon makes it common land. When God took from His people their special privileges they sunk to a level with all the other nations of the world. But they had broken the fence first, by their idolatry and neglect of the laws of God. Therefore they became unto him "as children of the Ethiopians" (Amos ix. 7). Therefore "the boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it" (Psalm lxxx. 13). A good father fences his children about with good laws and builds around them the wall of a good example. If his children set his laws at defiance, and leave the shelter of the home, and oblige their father to disinherit them, and so throw away their peculiar privileges, it is *they*, and not *he*, who break down the wall and place themselves beyond his peculiar care and love.

II.—That a nation or individual will be judged by the standard to which they might have attained.

What *might be*, not what *is*, is the standard in all departments of human life. If a farmer has a field capable of producing a good crop, and from neglect it brings forth only stunted grain or weeds, he is censured in proportion to what might have been accomplished and not praised for what is on the field. So a youth at school is judged. He is expected to bring forth fruit in proportion to his advantages and to his ability to use those advantages. God judged Israel on this principle. The nation had privileges, social, moral, and political, which the heathen did not possess. Because of these privileges they could have attained to a higher standard of moral excellence than any other nation in the world at that time, and this was expected of them. "He looked that it should bring forth grapes." They were judged by this expectation. "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke xii. 47). "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. xiii. 12). The condemnation deepens in proportion to the height of moral excellence which might have been reached.

III.—The end of ritual is righteousness.

The end of planting a vine in a good soil and of sheltering it from unfavourable influences, is *fruitfulness*. This alone will repay the care and trouble of the husbandman. There may be a luxuriant growth of leaves which will be beautiful to look upon, but if there is no fruit the end is not attained. The end of placing an electric wire in the bed of the Atlantic, was that it should carry news from one continent to the other. Much ingenuity might have been expended upon the weaving of the cable, but all the skill would have been useless if we could not receive and send our messages by means of it. The end of God's giving to Israel that ritual which distinguished them from the rest of mankind, was *righteousness of heart and life*. This was the meaning of their priesthood, their sacrifices, their social and national laws. "He looked for judgment (or

justice), but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

IV.—God will challenge men whom He condemns for the abuse of His mercy as to the equity of His dealings towards them. "O, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard."

The culprit who has been found guilty of a capital crime is asked, before the final sentence is passed, if he can give any reason why judgment should not be pronounced, so that after his doom is sealed, men shall feel that he had had an opportunity of denying his guilt. So God, the judge of all the earth, puts to the men of Judah the question whether they could bring forward any sufficient reason why the threatened judgment should not overtake them. God's judgment upon each man in the universe will itself be judged by each man's conscience, and the conclusion in every case will be, "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints (or of nations).—Rev. xv. 3.

SELECTED—I.

Israel is here represented under the figure of a vineyard, each family being a plant and each individual a branch thereof.

Notice—

I.—The care shown in the selection of the place in which the vineyard was planted. The "fruitful hill" sets forth the fact that Canaan possessed natural advantages so large that Israel needed not to be indebted to other lands for any of the necessaries or the comforts of life, and therefore would not, unless from their own fault, be exposed to the temptation of being drawn away by the idolatry of the nations around them.

II.—The provision made for its protection.

Some have supposed that the "fence," or wall, alludes to the natural position of Canaan and to the character of the country, which rendered it difficult of invasion from without. However that may be, the words no doubt mainly refer to the providential

defence which God raised up around His people, the nature of which was celebrated in their song at the Red Sea (Exod. xv. 14-16), and which was spoken of by Moses when they approached the borders of Canaan. "This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven," etc. (Deut. ii. 25), which promise was fully accomplished. (Josh. ii. 9).

III.—The means employed for rendering it fruitful. "He gathered out the stones thereof."

On the principle of interpretation which we have adopted, these words must refer to the expulsion of the idolatrous nations of Canaan. One of the reasons why this should be done is frequently repeated, "they will turn away thy son from following me," etc. It was therefore not merely because otherwise there would have been no room for planting the vineyard at all, but because, if these idolators had remained they would have ruined the vineyard when it was planted. The completion of the means of fruitfulness was the building of a tower, etc. These were the tabernacle of His glory whither Israel might repair to offer their offerings of righteousness, to receive communications of His will, through the prophets and priests, and latterly the kings, whom He set as watchmen to guard the interests of His vineyard, and whence they might carry those holy lessons, which, if learned and practised, would have made them to abound in all the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

IV.—The character of the vineyard itself—"the choicest vine." Some understand by this expression the patriarch Abraham, to whom God made over the land of Canaan by solemn covenant, so that he was the original vine, from whom sprang the house of Israel, the vineyard of the Lord. It appears, however, to be more in accordance with the scope and tenor of the parable to consider the expression as denoting the people of Israel, when first established in Canaan. That was unquestionably a very pure and prosperous period of their history.

It is testified that "they served the Lord all the days of Joshua" etc; and the words of the 80th Psalm, which refers to this period, remove, I think, any doubt upon the subject.

V.—The complaint brought against Israel by the Lord of the vineyard.

He does not say they were utterly barren. The charge against them was worse than this. They seemed to bring forth grapes, fair and fresh to the eye, but which when brought to the wine-press proved to be wild grapes. This sets forth their formal, lifeless, hypocritical profession, as described in the first chapter of this book, wherein Isaiah describes the offensiveness, in the sight of God, of their, "vain oblations" their calling of assemblies," etc.—*Robt. Gordon, D.D.*

SELECTED—II.

In this most elegant allegory God expostulates with the Jewish nation for their unnatural perverseness, and inexcusable unfruitfulness, under all His tender care. "The vineyard in a very fruitful hill" alludeth to the land of Canaan, which was a fair place; and to the Hill of Sion, which was the joy of the whole earth. The fencing, etc., figureth that particular Providence with which He watched over His inheritance, and rooted out from among them the idolatrous inhabitants. The tower and the winepress therein refers to His temple which He placed on high as the defence and ornament of His beloved possession, and to the duties there performed, and the blessings there conferred, by which they were convinced that the fruits of righteousness did happily produce the wine of gladness. After intimating what a difference there was between their practices and what might have been expected from their advantages, He appealeth to them to deliver their opinion in the case between Him and His vineyard, and then himself passeth judgment upon them. Unfruitfulness was their transgression, and barrenness shall be their punishment. Let us shift the scene

from the Jewish nation to the kingdom to which we belong, and let us—

I.—Consider what great things God has done for His vineyard to enable it and dispose it to bring forth grapes.

1. Our redemption by the blood of His beloved Son, and His condescending to enter into a covenant of grace with us, is a most wonderful instance of His favour and good-will, and a most forcible inducement to a godly life.

2. He hath given us a clear revelation of His will, and an admirable rule to direct us in our goings.

3. He hath also set before us an admirable pattern to hearten and encourage us in our progress. Every action of our Saviour's was a living sermon, and He expecteth nothing more from His disciples but that they should tread in those steps in which He hath gone before them : the first essay of all difficulties He took Himself, and left a beaten track for his followers to walk in.

4. He hath also given us the assistance of His Spirit, both to guide us in our way, and to uphold us in our goings.

5. He hath also prepared eternal rewards and punishments, to quicken us in our duty, by the great motive of self-interest.

II.—Reflect upon the return which He expecteth us to make for all our advantages. "I looked that it should bring forth grapes."

Each particular advantage which God hath imparted to us has a natural tendency to promote the bringing forth the fruits of holiness.

1. We are expressly told that "Christ gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity." This is its primary and immediate design ; to rescue us from punishment is a remoter effect.

2. The plain and equitable rule of life set before us is adapted to inform the weakest understanding and to convince the strongest judgment.

3. The example of the Saviour confuteth all objections that

may be coined by our laziness or our distrust of ourselves. If anything seemeth too hard for flesh and blood we are encouraged to endeavour at it by the reflection that it hath been performed by the Son of Man.

4. The influence of God's Spirit is to our spirits what the sun is to the vegetable world ; it communicateth to our souls a vital heat which bringeth the seeds of goodness to maturity.

5. The promise of eternal rewards and punishments tends to excite us to our duty and to deter us from the neglect of it. The prevailing passion of man is self-love ; and it is far from being blameworthy when duly regulated. God vouchsafes to address Himself to this part of our nature also, and to work by strong motives upon our hopes and fears.

II.—Let us see if we are not liable to the imputation of bringing forth wild grapes.

Hath Christ's redemption wrought in us a sense of the Divine Love and resolutions of gratitude and duty? Do we pay a uniform respect to all the injunctions of God's righteous law, or do we bend it to the crookedness of our ways and corrupt its straightness to conceal our own obliquity? Do we copy the purity of the Saviour's life, His humility and resignation to the will of God, His diligence in action, His constancy in suffering? Doth a reflection upon the inconceivable glories of hell, fire us in pursuit of them, or are we rather insensible of such spiritual ecstasies, and pant after a sensual paradise of Mahomet's preparing? Doth a sober contemplation of eternal punishment withhold us from the works of which it is the wages?—*Nicholas Brady, D.D.*

THE ROD OF THE ALMOND TREE AND THE SEETHING POT.

"*Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? and I said, I see the rod of an almond tree. Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen, for I will hasten my word to perform it. And the word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? and I said, I see a seething pot,*" *etc.*—Jer. i. 11-13.

We have here a parable for the eye instead of for the ear. In the teaching of the Lord Jesus we have many instances of the latter, and two which may be regarded as examples of the former class. In the institution of the Lord's Supper and in the Saviour's washing of His disciples' feet, we have parables appealing to the mind through the eye instead of through the ear, and both of them of such a character as to be more deeply impressive than any words setting forth the same truths. When Christ washed the feet of the apostles He *acted* a parable, and we have many instances in the Old Testament of the prophets being commanded to *act* parables. In the supper of remembrance the *action* is not so prominent, but it may be termed a parable in vision, inasmuch as it foretold to the apostles, and sets forth to us "The Lord's death" (1 Cor. xi. 26) by a symbol. (See preface.) The vision before us was parabolic, and contains *one thought* in different stages of development. In looking at any object through a telescope the first look may give us a correct impression of the object, but an adjustment of the lens may enable us to discern details which we could not see before. So in the case of the double vision here. The crowing of the cock is prophetic of the coming day; when his voice is heard we know that the day will shortly overtake us. The almond is the first tree to awake from the sleep of winter, and to put forth its blossoms as a sign that the spring will soon be here. God, in the vision of the almond branch, indicated that the judgments pronounced upon the Hebrew nation were nearing their fulfil-

ment. "I will hasten my word to perform it." The second vision gives more information than the first upon the same subject. In the first only the *fact* of the speedy retribution is made known, the second reveals *whence* it is to come—"out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land" (verse 14). The seething pot also shows the terror and confusion that would fill the city of Jerusalem when surrounded by her enemies. As the contents of a boiling cauldron, if it is full of liquid, pour over into the fire, and bye-and-bye are evaporated by the heat of the flame, so the inhabitants of Judea would boil over with indignation and wounded pride, and would fall into the hands of the invading armies "until the cities would be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate" (Isa. vi. 2).

The whole subject teaches—

I.—That those who have to utter the truth of God to others must first see it clearly themselves. "What seest thou?"

The eyes of the body are intended first for the use of the body in which they are placed: a man must first use his sight for his own information and benefit, and then he may be able to employ it to bless others. It is indispensable that a teacher of God's truth should see clearly what God wants him to see for himself, and then he may be the means of enabling other people to see. "*Thou hast well seen*," said God to Jeremiah. "That which *we have seen* and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us" (John i. 3).

II.—Those who can see the mind of God must be prepared to utter the truths they see. "Gird up thy loins and arise, and speak," &c. (verse 17.)

Men of genuis who see things in secret and think they see what is worth giving to the world, gird up their loins to put forth what they have seen in word, or on canvas, or in the sculptured marble. Christ instructed His first scholars to do

this. "What I tell you in darkness that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (Matt. x. 27). So Jeremiah must give out that which he has seen. That which has been revealed to his vision he must proclaim with his tongue.

III.—God often makes use of things far beneath us, to ma e known to us important truths.

The boiling pot and the almond branch were common every-day objects, yet God uses them as vehicles to convey to Jeremiah solemn truths respecting his people. So in the Saviour's parables of the lost piece of silver, and the leaven in the bread.

IV.—That the times and instruments of national judgment are in the hands of God.

In all well-ordered States there is a pre-arrangement for the chastisement of those whose character and conduct forbid that they should live in a state of freedom. The manner and means of punishment are pre-arranged by the law of the land, and those who would not obey the law as free citizens must accept existence on less favourable terms, and be subject to a severer law as condemned criminals. So with the Divine Ruler and those whom He governs. Israel would not be subject to the laws which He had given for the guidance of their national life, therefore the "king of the north" became God's pre-ordained instrument of chastisement, and the nation was compelled to accept the position of captives in a foreign land.

V.—God's chastisements increase in severity with the increase of national sin.

The treatment of the first symptoms of a disease may be mild, but if these fail to arrest its progress, the life of the patient may depend upon the use of more severe measures. God had again and again sent less severe chastisement upon the Jewish nation, but all had failed to stop their moral decay; hence the

necessity, if the nation were to continue in existence, of the execution of the judgments foretold in the prophetic vision.

VI.—The most childlike and humble in spirit see best into Divine mysteries.

Just before receiving this revelation Jeremiah had confessed his ignorance and inability. "Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child" (verse 6). Comp. Matt. xviii. 3-6; Isa. lvii. 15; 1 Cor. ii.

SELECTED.

God's justice is, 1, longsuffering; at first it uses only the rod (Rom. ii. 4); 2, recompensing zealously and severely. When the gentle chastisement is without result it becomes a consuming fire (Exod. xx. 5; Psa. vii. 12; Heb. x. 31).—*Ambrose quoted by Wordsworth.*

The Jews are said to be like a boiling pot, because the Lord, as it were, boiled them until they were reduced almost to nothing. It is said that the face was towards the north because there was the fire kindled. And the comparison is very apposite; for when a pot is set on the fire it boils on that side nearest the fire, and all the scum passes over to the other side. In short, God intended to show to His prophet that the people were like flesh which is cast into the pot, boiled, and afterwards burnt, or reduced, after a long time boiling, almost to nothing. —*Calvin.*

THE MARRED GIRDLE.

"*Thus saith the Lord unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water. So I got a girdle according to the word of the Lord,*" *etc.*—Jer. xiii. 1, 11.

I.—The introduction of this parable suggests—

(1.) *That God's method is to teach men by man.* "Thus saith

the Lord unto *me*," &c. There are those in God's great universe who have more wisdom from having lived much longer, and more goodness because they have always been sinless, and have placed to their account far more service than any man has ever rendered; yet none of these is sent to be the teacher of Israel. One of their own flesh and blood, one of their own nation, receives the Divine commission to teach them the great truths of God. Christ's first ministers claimed to be "men of like passions" with their fellow-men, yet preachers to them of "the living God" (Acts xiv. 15). "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. iv. 7). (2.) *That one man may thus bless many.* The one man who sows corn in a field is the instrument by which many are fed. The one man who holds the helm of government guides many. So the one man may be instrumentally the moral instructor of many. This principle has its widest, fullest application in our Saviour's relation to the human race, as expressed by Paul in Romans v. 10, 21. (3.) The commission to instruct the many which is given to a leader of men comes in the name of *One.* "Thus saith *the Lord.*" There is only one person in this country who can grant a commission in our army. So there is only One Being in the universe whose commission can really constitute a man a teacher of Divine truth. The reality of this commission must be impressed upon the man's heart and soul, proved by his ability, sealed by his character. He should be as fully impressed with the certainty that God has called him to this special service as an officer in the service of the Queen is certain that he holds a commission to lead his men to battle. (4.) Those whose business it is to instruct others, must spare no cost or pains in order to do it. "Get (or buy) a linen girdle, . . . go to Euphrates and hide it there." It is doubted by many commentators whether Jeremiah really undertook a journey to the river Euphrates. Henderson, and others, consider that Euphrata, near Bethlehem, is the place mentioned. Be this as it may, the transaction involved time and pains, and

outlay of money. "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord of that which hath cost me nothing" (2 Sam. xxiv. 24).

II.—The meaning of this symbolical act.

The girdle was, in all probability, of white linen such as was worn by the priests. Its colour was intended to remind Israel of the character they were expected to bear. They were to be a *holy* nation. "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus xix. 6). "Fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. xix. 8). The place where it was worn expresses the close intimacy which God desired to exist between Himself and His people. The girdle was an ornamental part of oriental dress. "And thou shalt make for them (Aaron's sons) girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory and for beauty" (Exodus xviii. 40). So Jehovah intended that Israel should glorify Him before the nations of the earth. "As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord: that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise and for a glory." (verse 11). Moreover, the girdle, by bracing up the body of a man, becomes a means of an increase of strength to the wearer. So the Hebrew nation was designed to be a power for God. By spreading among the Gentiles a knowledge of His truth they were to be co-workers with Him. The girdle in its marred condition could not have a renewal by washing. When garments are very much worn it is useless to attempt to remove their impurities by a process which, if they were not so far gone to decay, might again fit them for use. So Israel had so entirely degenerated that recovery by any ordinary chastisement was hopeless. Then the longer the girdle remained in the place where it had been placed by the prophet, the worse it would become. So the Jewish people would sink lower and lower so long as God permitted them to remain in their own land. The girdle in this state entirely failed to answer the purpose for which it had been made. It was woven to serve

a higher end than that of rotting in a hole in the rock, it was therefore lost because it was unfit to fulfil the intention of its maker. So Israel was a lost nation at this time because they fell so entirely short of the holy and honourable destiny for which they had been called out from the surrounding heathen.

LESSONS.

I.—No nation or church can claim invincibility or perpetuity on account of its great religious privileges. Israel had been near and dear to Jehovah, but her position of special favour did not prevent her corruption, and consequently did not save her from being removed from her position and ceasing for seventy years to exist as a separated people.

II.—A church or nation must have *life* if it is to continue to exist in a sound and healthy condition. The girdle in the rock was exposed to influences which were certain to destroy it, because there was no force within it to resist them. A *living creature* can resist the disintegrating influences of the elements, and even derive strength from the exercise, but an *inanimate thing* sooner or later succumbs. So the community which has not within it the life derived from God will be overcome by the forces of evil continually brought to bear upon it. Israel had refused to hear the words by which they might have lived (ver. 10), and had therefore lost the power of resisting the evil influences of the surrounding nations. "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil . . . But if thine heart turn away, *so that thou wilt not hear*, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them; I denounce unto you this day that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it." (Deut. xxx. 15-18).

SELECTED—I.

By *the hole in the rock* is signified their banishment, for with-

out honour and esteem the Jews lived in captivity, in the same manner as though they were cast into a cavern. By *the end* of *many days* is meant the length of their exile, for in a short time they would not have become putrefied, and except this had been expressed, they would never have been convinced of the grievousness of the calamity which was nigh them. The import of the whole is, "Though the dignity of Judah and Jerusalem has been great, '*yet will I mar it.*'"—*Calvin.*

SELECTED—II.

In this case much pains is taken to impress the force of the sign upon the prophet's mind. He must actually wear the girdle; he must take a journey to the Euphrates to hide it: he is not allowed to think of it as a fancy which has struck him and which he may let go or exchange for some other. He must exhaust the full meaning of it before he has done with it. The study must be a serious occupation, suspended perhaps for a time, but to be taken up again; the first thought suggested being part of a chain to which the last is linked. I apprehend this was a very wonderful education for a man's spirit, one which may supply very precious hints for the discipline of our own. What we want in every occupation is some means of preserving the continuity of our thoughts, some resistance to the influences which are continually distracting and dissipating them. But it is especially the student of the events of his own time, of the laws which regulate them, of the issues which proceed from them, who has need to be reminded that he is not studying a number of loose, unconnected phenomena, but is tracing a principle under different aspects and through different manifestations. A sensible illustration, if we would condescend to avail ourselves of it, would often save us from much vagueness and unreality.—*F. D. Maurice.*

THE POTTER'S VESSEL MARRED.

"*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words,*" *etc.*—Jer. xviii. 1-10.

In this type God declares—

I.—That the Hebrew nation, under the Divine method of government, had come to the hand of the Divine potter in a marred condition.

The potter executes his work according to a certain plan, he moulds the clay and places it upon the wheel in such a manner as seems most likely to produce a perfect piece of work. But, as in the instance before us, the result is not always what might be confidently expected, and this may be the case where there is no lack of skill on the part of the workman and no flaw in the machinery. So the Hebrew nation had been, for many generations, the special object of the Divine working. Their position in the land of Palestine, their moral, and social, and ceremonial laws, their national prosperity, springing from their covenant relation to God, were perfectly adapted to mould them into a holy people, "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use." But it had not done so. They had defiled themselves by sinking to the level of the heathen nations around them, and were now fitly compared to a vessel of clay which was so spoiled in the process of formation as to be utterly unfit for the purpose for which it was intended. But the parable likewise indicates—

II.—That there was still a possibility of the nation's recovery.

The potter is represented as again placing the vessel upon the wheel, as again moulding the clay, and this time with a happier result. The Jewish people were now to be removed from the beautiful land which they had polluted with idol worship, and they were to be carried captive into a strange

land, and that which all the manifold favours of God had not effected was to be wrought by very different means. The first turn of the potter's wheel had not produced the vessel desired; he must work again, and in a somewhat different manner, before the end would be attained.

It is clearly set forth—

III.—That the nation was marred, or, on the other hand, became what God intended it should be, by the exercise of its own choice. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation . . . . . If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them" (ver. 9, 10).

We see an illustration of this principle in the life of the family. The wheel of paternal government is, or ought to be, adapted to the formation of good character, and to this end chastisement is the consequence of certain transgressions which place it beyond the power of the parent to show his love to his child in a way more congenial to his feelings. But this interferes in no way with the child's freedom, and his repentance may make it possible for his father to forego the punishment. Submission to parental rule will bring out in the end the desired character, while rebellion against it, if persisted in, will mar it. God is, here and in many other places, said to repent of the good and of the evil which He thought to do unto Israel, which simply means that He will deal with them according as their conduct obliges Him, as a Moral Ruler, to do. They are here held responsible for the manner of God's dealings towards them, and their human freedom is clearly set forth as operating to mar the vessel, and as being the occasion of the judgment which was shortly to fall upon them.

Lessons.

I.—That although God has the *power*, He has not the *will*, to make a man a vessel of dishonour. When Paul refers to

this passage, he simply implies that God has the power to make one vessel unto honour and another to dishonour (Rom. ix. 21, 22). The whole tenor of the parable, as well as the known character of God, is *against* the conclusion that God had any pleasure in the degenerate character of Israel, or could possibly have put forth any power which would lead to such a result.

II.—The divine method of dealing is always the same in relation to the same characters. The rock in the ocean will be ever found in the same position in relation to the same objects. So God's dealing with character never changes. Those who, with sincere purpose of heart, turn their faces towards Him will find Him ready to respond to their cry, while to those who have "turned their backs unto Him" (Jer. ii. 27) He must necessarily "shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity" (ch. xviii. 17).

SELECTED—I.

What says the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, "Must I be denied the privilege of a common potter? May I not do what I will with mine own? I made and formed you into a people, and blessed you above every other nation under heaven; but, O Israel, thou, by thy backslidings, hast destroyed thyself. As the potter therefore might justly have thrown aside his marred clay, so may I justly unchurch and unpeople you. But what if I should come over the mountains of your guilt, heal your backslidings, and cause your latter ends greatly to increase? Behold, as the clay is in the hands of the potter lying at his disposal, either to be destroyed or formed into another vessel, so are ye in my hands, O house of Israel. I may either reject, and thereby ruin you, or I may revisit and revive you according to my own good will and pleasure." What Jehovah here says about the house of Israel in general, is applicable to every individual of mankind in particular. From the passage I deduce—

I.—That every man naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam, is in the sight of God a "piece of marred clay."

1. As to his *understanding*. Originally this, in respect both to things natural and divine, was of prodigious extent; being made but a little lower than the angels, he knew much of God, of himself, and all about him. But now the case is far different. The greatest scholars are in the dark respecting the minutest things of life; and after all their painful researches into the *Arcanæ Naturæ* they find such an immeasurable expanse yet to be traversed, that they are obliged to conclude that "they know nothing yet as they ought to know." In respect to spiritual things, an inspired apostle tells us that "the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God." 2. That man is marred is more evident if we consider the *perverse bent of his will*. God's will and man's will were once like unisons in music. But now he hath a will which is by nature contrary to the will of God. 3. A transient view of fallen man's *affections* will yet more confirm this melancholy truth. These, at first, like so many gentle rivers, sweetly, spontaneously, and habitually glided into their ocean, God. But now we are naturally full of vile affections, which like a mighty and impetuous torrent carry all before them. 4. The present *blindness of natural conscience* makes this appear in a still more glaring light. In the soul of Adam, conscience was no doubt the candle of the Lord, and enabled him rightly and instantaneously to discern between right and wrong. And, blessed be God, some remains of this are left, yet how dimly does it burn, how easily and quickly is it covered, or put out and extinguished. 5. The *depravity of our reason* also demonstrates that man is a piece of marred clay. Far be it from me to decry human reason. But it would not take much time to prove that only so far as we conform ourselves to the laws of Jesus Christ do we act agreeably to the laws of right reason. 6. The present *disordered frame and constitution of our bodies* confirms the same also. In this respect man is, most literally, a piece of marred clay. Although a little red earth was the substratum out of which we

were all formed, yet I can but think that as the eternal *Logos* was hereafter to appear, God manifest in the flesh, infinite wisdom was exerted in forming a casket in which so invaluable a pearl was in the fulness of time to be deposited. But now, on this, as well as on other accounts, man may justly be called Ichabod.

II.—Consider the absolute necessity there is of the fallen nature being renewed.

On this account I have been so explicit on the first head, for, granting the foregoing doctrine to be true, let him who can deny the necessity of man's renewal. And by whose agency is this to be effected? Not by the mere dint and force of moral suasion, although this is good in its place. Neither by the power of our own free-will. "No man," says Christ, "can come unto me except the Father which has sent me, draw him." This heavenly Potter, this blessed agent, is the Almighty Spirit of God.—*George Whitefield.*

SELECTED—II

When Jeremiah was sent to study the potter's work, he was sent to ascertain, not what the potter might do if he liked, but *what* he liked. He desired to make a vessel of a certain form. That was the end for which he laboured. If there is any force or worth in the analogy at all, it must mean that there is a form according to which God is seeking to mould men and nations. It must imply that He is not doing a single act arbitrarily or without reference to a purpose; it must imply that He is patiently, continually working for the accomplishment of this purpose. The language used here is perfectly consistent with the whole tenor of Scripture, because here and everywhere men are assumed to have *wills*, upon which no mere blind mechanical power *can* operate, but upon which God, a Living Person, is operating by gracious, mysterious, orderly processes, that He may make them in His own likeness. And if they do not submit to this process, if they persist in

not taking the mould which He would give them, then the clay is broken that it may be reformed, that the original intention of its owner may be carried out. Here then was the mystery of the people's repentance. There are two points of the prophet's application that require especial notice:

I.—That he looks upon this symbol as teaching the principle of God's government of a *people*. God not only tries these processes with an individual, but He regards a *nation* as a *spiritual reality*, of which we can predicate spiritual conditions and emotions, which can repent and reform as truly as an individual can.

II.—If God's promise, that His Son's kingdom shall have no end, means that all the races that He has invited to become portions of it shall always continue to be portions of it, how should Jerusalem, Constantinople, Alexandria, have fallen under the power of the Crescent? Are not these cities proofs that the clay is marred in the new, as it was in the old time, when it resists the will of the Artificer? What is there in the clay of England to give it an exemption from the sentence upon that which is profitable for nothing?

But we know that whatever happens to one generation or another, the vision in the potter's house will be fulfilled in another very blessed and literal manner. He, who has given each of us a tenement of clay, may subject it to much hard discipline, may suffer it at last to be quite marred, and return to its kindred earth again. "But if the Spirit of Him who raised up Christ from the dead dwell in us, He will also quicken our mortal bodies."—*F. D. Maurice.*

THE POTTER'S VESSEL BROKEN.

"*Thus saith the Lord, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests, and go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee . . . . . Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, and shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again," etc.*—Jeremiah xix. 1–13.

Observe—

I. The difference between the parable of the marred vessel and that of the broken vessel.

The first parable speaks of *reformation.* The clay was as yet soft, it had not been hardened by exposure to the sun or to the fire. Therefore it could be moulded over again. Although marred there was a possibility of its yet assuming the desired form. It suggested the thought that Israel was not so confirmed in habits of sin as to be beyond hope of recovery. This parable speaks of *destruction.* The vessel was made of clay which had become hard, and it was impossible to re-model it. Therefore it was broken to shivers.

II.—The insight which this parable gives into the spiritual condition of the people to whom it was spoken.

People who needed to have the messages of God brought home to them by such signs as this, who seem to have been incapable of laying to heart God's Word unless it was accompanied by some external manifestation, must have had little spiritual perception, and were therefore most likely to be in a low state as regards moral character. A child must be taught abstract truth, to a great extent, by the use of concrete substances, and children in spiritual perception must be treated in the same way.

III.—The signification of the parable.

It declares that the nation would, in time, fill up the full measure of its iniquity. The Divine potter never *breaks* what can be *mended.* The careful householder never destroys what can be repaired or utilised in another form. The husbandman destroys nothing but weeds, and even weeds he will use in the form of ashes to fertilise his field. The dust of the coal can be used in the furnace. God, who "gathers up the fragments," will not destroy that which can be renewed. The parable foretells the destruction of Israel as a *nation*, and seems not to have been completely fulfilled until its conquest by the Romans, although it was most likely intended to foretell the approaching captivity. It must not be forgotten, however, that Paul seems to teach that even the scattered fragments will again be united into a whole (Rom. xi.) The message which accompanied the parable, being a repetition of the curses threatened by Moses in Deut. xxviii., is intended to make the people feel that the fault was with themselves alone if the curses therein foretold were fulfilled, and the promised blessings withheld. We come into this world and find laws in existence which we soon understand are *prophecies.* They tell us beforehand that their observance will be accompanied with blessing and their non-observance with penalty. We can choose for ourselves which shall be fulfilled in our case. The people to whom Jeremiah brought this message found themselves in such a position. God had set before them "life and good, and death and evil" (Deut. xxx. 15). They had been expressly forewarned, "If thou wilt not hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments . . . . The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies . . . And thou shalt eat the flesh of thine own body" etc. (Deut. xxviii. 25-53). So that the terrible woes foretold in this chapter were the *choice* of the people of Israel, and not unheard-of penalties now promulgated for the first time.

LESSONS.

I.—God deals with nations in and by their representatives. The prophet is commanded to deliver his message to "the ancients of the people and to the ancients of the priests." Representative dealing has been common among men from the earliest times. It holds a large place in God's government of the world, and will ever be in operation while Christ is the Head of the Church, and while there are inequalities among His finite creatures. Inequalities among human beings make representative government necessary and just.

II.—Crimes committed in the garb of religion will be dealt with by God in the light of common humanity. A legal crime will not be passed over because it takes the form of a religious act. One of the charges brought against Israel here, is, that they offered their sons as burnt offerings unto Baal (verse 5). God looked upon this as murder, and punished it accordingly. Therefore no cruelties inflicted by one man upon another can be excused by such a plea.

III.—The place of the crime may be the place of punishment. Topheth had been the scene of the sacrifices to Molech (2 Kings xxiii. 10). It was to witness the retribution (verses 11-13). Jerusalem, the city where the Son of God was crucified, became the theatre of the terrible destruction of the nation who were guilty of the monstrous act.

TWO BASKETS OF FIGS.

"*The Lord shewed me, and behold two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord,*" *etc.*—Jeremiah xxiv. 1-3.

Before entering upon the exposition of the parable, it may be well to notice—

I.—That unlike those of the potter's vessels this is a *vision.*

"The Lord shewed me," etc. There was a special interposition of God in the matter which would not have been needed if Jeremiah had seen the figs with his bodily eyes as he saw the potter working at his wheel. We therefore conclude that the baskets of figs here spoken of had no objective existence, but were seen by Jeremiah in vision only as we see things in dreams. But, 2. That, although the parable was received by the prophet in a vision, he was not unconscious, as we are, to some extent, when dreaming. He held converse with God, was able to receive from Him a message from Israel, therefore he was in a state of consciousness and responsibility. 3. That the exact date of the vision is recorded. It was given immediately after Nebuchadnezzar had carried into Babylon the reigning king of Judah, Jeconiah, Coniah, or Jehoiachin, who, feeling that resistance was useless, surrendered himself into the hands of the Babylonish king. (See Chron. xxii. 21; 2 Kings, xxiv. 12.)

The Teaching of the Vision.

I.—That the same nation may contain two distinct characters, yet both may be equally involved in a national visitation.

Jeremiah saw figs that were so bad that they could not be eaten, and others that were "like the figs that are first ripe," very good. Daniel, Ezekiel, and the three Hebrew youths belonged to the same nation as Jeconiah and Zedekiah. Yet all were carried captive to Babylon. There may be very good and very bad men sailing together in the same ship, but if the vessel founders, the sea will be the grave of both. The laws of nature pay no regard to character. The most godly and the most vicious people may dwell together in the same house, and if it takes fire, saint and sinner may be both consumed in the flames. There are laws of retribution in operation in relation to nations which, so far as the outward condition is concerned, are no respecters of persons.

II.—That submission to Divine chastisement will lead, in time, to deliverance from it, while resistance will bring ruin.

Two members of a family may be suffering from the same disease, the physician will insist upon submission to his treatment from both his patients. If one refuses, he must not complain of the physician, supposing he grows worse. God desired to heal the Jewish nation of its idolatrous tendencies; for this purpose He had decreed that it should go into captivity. Those who submitted willingly are here promised that the discipline should be "for their good," and that they should be brought again to their own land; while those who resisted, would "be consumed from off the land that He gave unto them and their fathers." Those who submitted are represented in the "good figs," and those who resisted are likened to the "evil figs." The whole is an exposition of Peter's injunction "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter v. 6).

Lessons.

I.—That in this life retribution to nations is more certain than to individuals. God can deal with individual characters in any world, therefore we sometimes find the greatest villains apparently unmarked by Him now. But

"In that world 'tis not so."

But nations do not exist in the same relations in another life, and therefore national crimes will, when their iniquity is full, meet here with full retribution as certainly as the sun rises upon the earth. Individuals have left the world without receiving their just punishment, but no nation that has been guilty of great national crimes has escaped being tried, sentenced, and punished by the Supreme Ruler.

II.—That outward circumstance is no standard by which to judge God's estimate of character. Job's friends were not afflicted as he was, but God esteemed him far more highly than he did them. His "beloved Son," in whom He was "well-pleased," had not where to lay his head. Zedekiah, and those

who were at present left with him in Jerusalem, might have thought themselves more highly favoured of God than Daniel and his friends; this word of the Lord says they were mistaken.

III.—Moral crime is commercial ruin to a nation. Israel lost God first, and then her national prosperity and greatness. A body soon decays when the life has departed, and a putrid carcase will soon be visited by the birds of prey.

SELECTED—I.

The baskets of figs were set before the temple to signify that the whole people stood at God's tribunal. The prophet speaks not here of persons but of punishment, as though he had said, "ye feel a dread when these exiles are mentioned, who have been deprived of the inheritance promised them by God: this seems hard to you; but this is moderate when you consider what end awaits you." He, then, does not call Jeconiah and the other captives good in themselves; but He calls them good figs because God had chastised them more gently than the rest. He calls the Jews who remained bad figs, not only because they were more wicked, but because the severity of God was to be greater towards them.—*Calvin.*

SELECTED II.

I.—The prisoners and broken-hearted are like the good figs, well-pleasing to God. For (1) they know the Lord and turn to Him; (2) He is their God and they are His people.

II. Those who dwell proudly and securely are displeasing to God, like the bad figs. For (1) they live on in foolish blindness; (2) they challenge the judgment of God.—*Lange's Commentary.*

BONDS AND YOKES WORN BY JEREMIAH.

"*Thus saith the Lord unto me, make thee bonds and yokes and put them upon thy neck . . . . Then Hananiah, the prophet, took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck and brake it,*" *&c.*—Jer. xxvii. and xxviii.

The message to which this parabolic action of Jeremiah was designed to give weight and significance, teaches—

I.—The origin of the earth and the origin of man. "I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground" (verse 5).

The origin of non-intelligent existence and that of created intelligences are everywhere in the Bible referred to one Supreme God. Man had a birthday, and for all practical purposes his birthday was his beginning. So the earth had a birthday in the past which was the beginning of its history. The earth, therefore, is a distinct existence and has an identity of its own, and man has a distinct identity also. All created things are distinct from the cause which caused them to be. The cause and the effect are not the same. One Being again and again claims to be the cause of the existence of all that we see around us, and of our own existence. If the Hebrew nation and the Hebrew writings are facts of history, then God, whose words and deeds are so constantly interwoven with them, is a fact of history also. When the earth was born God has not told us, neither has He revealed, when He placed the first man upon it. But we know that the words "in the beginning" point far back into the ages of the past, and that the earth is of great antiquity compared with us, although in comparison with the eternity of God it is nothing. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job xxxviii. 4).

II.—That God claims a right to do what He pleases with His own personal property. "I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon" (ver. 6).

A man who owns property, even if he be a bad man, is at liberty to give it to whom he will. No law can prevent a man from doing what he wills with his own in this respect, even although he may act selfishly and unjustly in the disposal of it. We feel that the rights of men would be endangered if this freedom of action was withdrawn. If we consent to the right of a bad man how much more readily do we feel willing that a good man should dispose of his possessions in such a manner as he sees fit, being assured that he will be guided by wise, unselfish motives. How much more readily ought men to acquiesce in God's claim to do according to His will with the earth and its inhabitants, seeing: 1. That they are His in a deeper and wider sense than any possession is the property of man. He called into existence the dust out of which He created earth and man. He "that spread forth the earth and that which cometh out of it, He that giveth breath to the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein"—(Isa. xlii. 5)—has a right of possession which springs from creation. 2. That we know that He disposes of His property for the furtherance of moral ends, and that in so doing He is guided by infinite wisdom. If a rich man expends his wealth for the benefit of his fellow-creatures we honour his motives, even though we feel that he is mistaken in the agency that he employs, but we know that, with God, both end and means are alike perfect. God was now about to give His chosen people and their land, and the nations which surrounded them, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar for the furtherance of moral ends, for the chastisement of sin, for the improvement of character.

Application.

I.—That when we refuse to submit to God's plan of salvation and insist upon our own, we must not afterwards blame Him for the consequences of our choice. We should look upon a man as very foolish, if, after setting his own timepiece according to his fancy, he were to find fault with a watch which has been

regulated by the sun, and call that wrong and his own time right. He would be charged with laying the blame in the wrong place. So it is with men who set aside the plan of God with regard to their lives, and then blame Him for that which they have brought upon themselves. God's plan for Israel's reformation was that they should go into captivity. The message which Jeremiah brought to Zedekiah and his people was, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord hath spoken against the nations that will not serve the king of Babylon?" (ch. xxvii. 12, 13). But they rejected God's plan and the advice of His servant, and had no one to blame but themselves in the sufferings which followed (ch. xxxix. 6-8).

II.—That God will send as light an affliction as will attain the end desired. It has been well said that a government is severe in the ratio of its weakness. God's Almighty power enables Him to exercise mercy even when He inflicts necessary chastisement. His design is not to destroy, but to regenerate, and this is seen, in a marked manner, in His dealings with Israel at this time.

III.—But when a light affliction is not freely accepted, a heavier one must be laid upon men by force. Thus saith the Lord, "Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron" (ch. xxviii. 13).

> "Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
> God's messenger sent down to thee, do thou
> With courtesy receive him, rise and bow,
> And ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
> Permission first his heavenly feet to lave,
> Then lay before him all thou hast, allow
> No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,
> Nor mar thy hospitality."

IV.—We may always be assured that trials sent from God will, if accepted by us, be for our moral profit, however much they may appear to be against it. It is recorded that once,

when the chances of war gave a number of English officers into the hands of an Indian prince, the captives looked forward to certain death as the consequence of the hard fare and severe treatment to which they were subjected. But, instead of that, the health of the entire party, which had been much impaired by luxurious living, was entirely re-established during their captivity, and, that which they expected to *kill* them, *cured* them. It did not seem likely that the Jews would be cured of their idolatrous tendencies by being taken into the midst of a nation of idolators, but so it was.

SELECTED.

It was a sad spectacle to see on the neck of Jeremiah the symbol of the bondage of all kings and nations; he was, as it were, in the place of all, a captive before his time. But this confirmation rendered the Jews more inexcusable, as the case is, when God, to strengthen faith, adds sacraments and other helps to His Word, by which means He teaches not only our ears, but also our eyes and all our senses. When God thus omits nothing that may tend to strengthen our faith in His Word, a heavier condemnation awaits us if such signs fail. The doctrine added to the sign is addressed to all nations; but the Jews ought to have reasoned from the less to the greater; for if God would so severely punish the Gentiles if they withdrew themselves from under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, how much heavier vengeance the Jews ought to have dreaded, who knew that it was God's righteous judgment by which their sins were punished. A promise is added when the command to submit is addressed to Zedekiah (verse 12). The best remedy for alleviating evils is to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; for thus it happens that they are turned into medicines and thus become salutary to us. If we willingly condemn ourselves, we anticipate extreme judgment—as Paul says, we condemn ourselves—and then we shall not be condemned by God (1 Cor. xi. 31).—*Calvin.*

JEREMIAH HIDES THE STONES IN THE BRICK KILN.

"*Then came the word of the Lord to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick kiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, my servant, and I will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them,*" *etc.*—Jer. xliii. 8-13.

These stones were eloquent to those of the men of Judah who witnessed the prophet's parabolic action, and whose minds were open to the reception of Divine truth.

I.—They preached of the historic past.

1. From the soil in which they were found. They were stones of Egypt. The very soil whence they were taken might have reminded Israel of the bondage of their fathers, and of the "outstretched arm and mighty hand" by which they had been delivered. 2. The place where they were buried—the brick kiln—must have carried their thoughts back to the hard labour of their ancestors under the lash of the taskmasters, and to the day when God made the ashes of the brick kiln the instrument of retribution to their oppressors (Exod. ix. 8). 3. The burial of the stones beneath the ground might have suggested the past condition of Israel in this same land, they were buried under the oppressive tyranny of the heathen monarch and his people, and had been raised, as it were, from a grave of degradation and lifted into a new life as a free people by the mighty hand of God. These thoughts of the past might have led them to hope that, though their nation was now undergoing a just chastisement for their ingratitude to Jehovah, there was a hidden purpose of mercy in His heart towards them if they

would but listen to the voice of His prophet. The goodness of God is, as it were, hidden in the earth in the time of winter. But by-and-bye the green blade bursts through the clod, and makes manifest how He has been working in secret to make His purpose of mercy manifest in due time. So in the darkest days of chastisement, God is working an end of mercy for those who humble themselves under His mighty hand.

II.—They prophesied of the future.

The men of Judah had fled into Egypt in opposition to the command of Jehovah, hoping thereby to escape the doom which had been pronounced against them. Now, it is foretold that it was useless for them to try and escape, as upon that very spot, at the very entrance to Pharaoh's palace, Nebuchadnezzar's royal tent should be erected. (With regard to the fulfilment of this prophecy, Lange says, "Josephus, as is well known, relates that Nebuchadnezzar, in the fifth year after the capture of Jerusalem, himself led an army into Cœlo-Syria, and after the conquest of this country, invaded Egypt. On this occasion he killed the then reigning king of Egypt, set up another in his stead, and again led away Jews captive to Babylonia. Now if whatever in this account relates to the Egyptian king be erroneous—see Neibuhr—it is still, however, possible that Nebuchadnezzar, during the thirteen years' siege of Tyre, which began directly after the conquest of Jerusalem, had the desire and the leisure to make an expedition through Cœlo-Syria and the East Jordanic countries to Egypt"). Thus the stones brought both the past and the future into the present, in order, if it were possible, to induce the wayward Jews to seek help and refuge where alone it was to be found. The subject teaches :—

I.—That the only refuge from the displeasure of God is to be found in God Himself. The child who cannot turn aside his father's anger by flight, or by force, may obtain his pardon by tears of repentance. God's presence cannot be got rid of, His omnipotence cannot be overthrown, nor His plans undermined,

but there is a way in which He delights to be conquered, as He was by Israel at Bethel when "he had power of the angel and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto Him (Hosea xii. 4). "Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me" (Isa. xxvii. 5).

II.—That unbelief in the Divine Word will not prevent the fulfilment of it. The men of Judah did not believe Jeremiah's message, but said, "We will not hearken unto thee" (Jer. xliv. 16). But as their unbelief did not stay the approaching invasion of the King of Babylon, so neither will men's unbelief in the Gospel of God avert the penalty from those who reject its invitations.

III.—That the true minister of God will not be deterred by opposition from declaring the judgments, as well as the mercies, of God. From all we know about Jeremiah we conclude that his natural temperament would have inclined him rather to mourn over his people's sins in secret than to denounce them openly. We know that at first he shrunk from the prophetical office (Jer. i. 6, 7). But, obedient to the call of God, he stood forth and braved contempt and suffering when he felt that he was called to do so. Like another great servant of the same Master, "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, he persuaded men" (2 Cor. v. 11).

Note.—According to tradition, Jeremiah was stoned to death by his countrymen in Tahpanhes.

SELECTED.

At the present day, when we wish to convey to posterity the account of some accomplished fact, or the prediction of some fact to be accomplished (*ex. gr.*, a last testament), we take paper and ink, write it down, seal it, have it subscribed by witnesses, and preserve it in the registrar's or recorder's office. In ancient

times they took a simpler and surer way. Jacob and Laban simply erected a heap of stones (Gen. xxxi.), the two and a half tribes built an altar on the bank of the Jordan (Josh. xxii.). As long as the heap and the altar were standing, the record was transmitted from generation to generation for what object these stones were set up, and thus, that which it was desired to convey to posterity lived in the memory of man. Jeremiah also knows how to use ink and pen (ch. xxxii.), but here he returns once more to the old manner of preserving archives.—*Lange's Commentary.*

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF THE CHERUBIM AND THE WHEELS, ETC.

"*And I looked, and behold a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it,*" *etc.*—Ezek. i. 4-28.

Before considering this parabolic vision itself, notice,

1. That the exact date of its occurrence is recorded, "in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity." The appointment to a new office, bringing new responsibilities, is worthy of record in any human life. The date of entrance into new relations out of which will spring new views of human life and of God, deserves to be noted, and especially is this the case when a man receives a call from God to a special service, and has new views given to him of the righteousness of God and the ways of His providence. Ezekiel here particularly notes the time when God called him to be a prophet, and fitted him for the work by giving him "visions of God," which we may call a parable of His providence. 2. Notice the society from which the prophet was called to see the vision, "I was among the captives by the river of Chebar." The visions of God cannot be revealed to

any man, because many men's souls have not eyes to see them. There are visions of God in nature which can be seen by some, yet are invisible to others. The men that journeyed with Paul saw no man nor heard the words of Him who spake. (Comp. Acts ix. 7, xxii. 9.) 3. That the teaching contained in the vision must be of the highest importance because it is a revelation of the Highest Intelligence. Thoughts are valuable in proportion to the wisdom and goodness of those who impart them to us. The visions of man are of worth if he is himself of moral and intellectual worth, otherwise his thoughts will pass over us like the shadows of clouds upon the surface of the sea. They will leave no permanent impression of benefit. God's thoughts come from a deep, sweet well of goodness and wisdom, and therefore His visions contain thoughts of priceless worth. "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God" (Psa. cxxxix. 17). 4. But to give these thoughts to us God must clothe them in language or in forms which are within the reach of our comprehension. We teach a child of that which he does not know by comparing it with things about which he does know. And we do this, not from our inability to teach in any other way, but from his inability to receive instruction in any other way. God, in this vision, clothes unseen and eternal realities in the raiment of seen and temporal things. He unfolds His method of working in the world by means of clouds, fire, &c., in certain combinations, because Ezekiel would realise more vividly what God wished to teach him in this way than in any other. 5. It is also worthy of notice that this vision includes all forms of Divine manifestation up to the period when it was given. There is the fire which appeared to Abraham, to Moses, to Israel at Sinai; the whirlwind out of which God spoke to Job, and which rent the mountains before Elijah; the rainbow, which was the sign of God's covenant with Noah; a cloud of glory such as had often rested on the tabernacle and temple; and the human form in which the Judge of all the earth appeared to Abraham. But a new symbol is found here in the mysterious wheels of beryl, "full of eyes" and "so high that they

were dreadful." The main teaching of the vision appears to be :—

I.—That though the operation of God's providence is constantly before us, the method of His working appears very complicated.

The wheels were in motion. Wheels are constructed to move. This is their normal condition ; rest is the exception. So God's laws of providence and of nature are always in operation. Constant motion is the order of life. One event constantly succeeding another makes the history of the world. And these events, although dependent upon man as the instrumental cause, have their origin in the permission, or the direct interposition, of God. But we are often much perplexed as to what the events of God's providence mean, and as to what they are tending. Or if we see their practical results, we do not understand how those results have been brought about. So the construction and motion of these mighty wheels of beryl in the vision which appeared to Ezekiel. "There was a wheel within a wheel," one was at right angles with the other, and their motion was inexplicable ; "they went upon their four sides."

II.—But though God's working in Providence is mysterious to us, His purpose is ever one and the same.

The wheels went by the living creatures, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. And these living creatures "went straightforward, they turned not as they went." They had one purpose in view and one work to perform, so that there was no real change in the direction of their movements. Sometimes the greatest apparent *confusion* is the *result* of unity of purpose. In the roar and confusion of a battle one purpose is behind all, and is indeed the occasion of all. One battalion may seem to be moving in opposition to another, and the entire field may appear to be a scene of hopeless confusion to an unpractised eye. But one mind is behind all, and the

present apparent *disorder* is all tending to a future *order*. There is a forward movement according to a pre-ordained plan. The workings of Providence seemed very contrary to Job's idea of God's righteousness and goodness; they made God appear to His servant as an unjust ruler, yet there was a plan and a forward movement in them all. Far more perplexing were the ways of the Eternal Father to the mind of Christ's first disciples, when they saw their Master expire upon the cross, and heard that Holy One cry out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" But they lived to see that this turn of the wheel of Providence was straightforward towards the accomplishment of the end for which their Lord was manifest in the flesh, even to the "gathering together in one all things in Christ" (Ephes. i. 10).

III.—That the purpose of all the perplexing movements of God's providential movements is "peace on earth."

The rainbow was round about the throne in Ezekiel's vision at Chebar as in John's at Patmos (Rev. iv. 3). Indicating that after the cloud and the whirlwind of necessary judgment and suffering, and sorrow, there was to be a "clear shining after the rain." The rainbow shows itself before the storm is over, the black cloud and the bright sunshine divide the heavens between them, and there is a point where the blue sky and the darkness meet. So in God's chastisement and retribution; on one side it looks very dark, but, even if we see no light, we know that the other side is turned to the Eternal Sun and that "righteousness and peace kiss each other" in all God's dealings. Nebuchadnezzar had come like a whirlwind to Judea and desolated the home of Ezekiel, the man of God. What had he done to deserve to be taken captive into Babylon? To him and to others like him the cloud must have looked black, but there was a rainbow upon it for him, and he knew that the Sun of Righteousness was still shining in the heavens. The consciousness of God's rectitude of character is the sun which will make a rainbow upon the darkest cloud of His provi-

dence. We look at a *man's* providence through his character. If we have the fullest confidence in *that*, we interpret even those actions which we cannot understand in the light of it. If we do this with God's dealings, we shall see the rainbow upon those which look the darkest.

IV.—That all the complex motions of Providence are guided by One who has sympathy with men. "Upon the throne was the likeness of a man."

To us this means more than it could have conveyed to Ezekiel. But it assured him that amidst all the sufferings of that sad time there was One who "was afflicted in all the affliction" of His people (Isa. lxiii. 9), who knew their frame, who remembered that they were dust, who pitied them as a father pities his child (Psa. ciii., 13, 14), even while He is using the rod.

SELECTED—I.

The heaven opens not merely when to our eye a glimpse is disclosed of the heavenly glory of God (Calvin), but also when God manifests His glory in a manner perceptible to human sight. The latter was the case here. The description begins with a general outline of the phenomenon as the same presented itself to the spiritual eye of the prophet. A tempestuous wind brings from the north a great cloud, the centre of which appears as a lump of fire, which throws around the cloud the brightness of light, and presents in its midst the appearance of glowing metal. The coming from the north signifies that it is from the north that God will bring to pass the judgment upon Judah. The four cherubim having "the figure of a man" are to be conceived as presenting the appearance of a human body in all points not otherwise specified. Their feet were "straight," *i.e.*, standing upright. The top or upper right wing of each cherub came in contact with the top of the left wing of the neighbouring cherub, implying, as a consequence, their harmonious action. They moved, not according to the action of

their own will, but wherever the Spirit impelled them. Fire, like the fire of burning coals or torches, moved hither and thither among the living creatures. Beside the front face of each cherubim a wheel was to be seen upon the earth. The beryl of which they were composed is the chrysolite of the ancients, the topaz of the moderns, a stone having the lustre of gold. In each wheel a second was inserted at right angles, so that, without being turned, it could go towards all the four sides. As regards their felloes, they possessed height and terribleness—the latter because they were full of eyes all round. They were, in motion and rest, completely bound by the motion and rest of the creatures. Above the heads of the cherubim Ezekiel sees an outstretched canopy resembling the firmament, which has the shining appearance of the fear-inspiring crystal. From above this canopy he hears a voice, which re-echoes in the rushing of the wings of the cherubim, and determines their movements. The wings of the cherubim spread out in a horizontal direction, so that they appeared to support the canopy. As the creatures moved, Ezekiel hears the rustling of their wings, like the roaring of mighty billows. There came also a loud voice from above the canopy, according to whose command the creatures moved or stood still. Above or over upon the firmament was to be seen, like a sapphire stone, the likeness of a throne on which sat one in the form of a man—*i.e.*, Jehovah appeared in human form, as in Dan. vii. 9 *sq*. Upon this was poured out a fiery, shiny light, like glowing brass and like fire. (This appears to be the simplest explanation of ver. 27.) Round about the throne is a shining light like the rainbow in the clouds. —*Kiel.*

SELECTED—II.

The general correspondence between what Ezekiel saw in the visions of God, and what was to be found in the temple, indicated that it was the same God who dwelt between the cherubim in the temple who now appeared to His servant on the banks of the Chebar; while the differences bespoke certain

manifestations of the Divine character to be now at hand, such as required to be less prominently displayed in his ordinary procedure. 1. It was intimated by the presence of the cherubim that He appeared specially as the God of holiness. The employment of these composite forms pointed back to their original destination in the garden of Eden, to keep the way to the tree of life from which man had been debarred by sin; ideal creatures, as the region of blessed life they occupied had now become to man an ideal territory. Yet still they are creatures of human mould, and we can think of no reason for the singular combination of animal and human forms except to exhibit the higher elements of humanity in some kind of organic combination with certain distinctive properties of the inferior creation. The multiplicity of their eyes, appearing primarily in the wheels attached to them, makes them known as wholly inspirited, for the eye is the symbol of intelligent life, the living spirit's most peculiar organ and index. Their incessant activity symbolises their plenitude of life. 2. But this idea of holy and spiritual life was greatly strengthened by the fervid appearance, as of metallic brightness and liquid flame, which shone from and surrounded all parts and figures of the vision. It denotes the intense and holy severity of God's working, and is similar in meaning to Isaiah's vision (chap. vi.) where the name of seraphim, or "burning ones," is substituted for the usual name of cherubim: the emblems of God's purifying and destroying righteousness. It made known God's purpose to put forth the severer attributes of His character and to purify his Church by "the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning." 3. To make out the idea more completely, wheels of vast proportions were added to the cherubim. The prophet would thus render palpable to our view the gigantic and terrible energy which was going to characterise the manifestations of the God of Israel. A spirit of awful and resistless might was now to appear in His dealings. Not, however, proceeding by a blind impulse, but in all its movements guided by a clear-sighted and unerring

sagacity. Finally, above the cherubim and their wonderful wheel-work, was seen, first, the crystal firmament, and then the throne of God, on which He Himself sat in human form—a form, as here displayed, beaming with the splendour of heavenly fire, but, at the same time, bearing the engaging aspect of a man, and surrounded with the attractive halo of the rainbow. In this shone forth the overawing authority on the one hand, and the gracious sympathy on the other, which were to distinguish His agency as now to be put forth. The terror which the manifestation was fitted to inspire was to be terror only to the guilty, while for the penitent and believing there was to be the brightest display of covenant love and faithfulness. The appearance of the rainbow was like hanging out the flag of peace, giving assurance to all, that the purpose of Heaven was to preserve rather than to destroy.—*Fairbairn.*

SELECTED—III.

There is no necessity for regarding the cherubic forms as symbolical of *any one order* of created beings exclusively; but rather they seem to be designed to *embrace and unite all the orders of holy intelligences, whether angels or men*, and to be significant of *moral and intellectual properties, whatever order of beings may possess them.* And the machinery of the wheels, I conceive, designed to represent *the system of Physical or Material Agencies, the entire course of the physical world* united with the intellectual and moral agencies represented in the cherubim under the government of the Messiah, and rendered subservient to the interests of the Church, and the ultimate manifestation of the Divine glory. Contemplate, therefore,

I.—The variety of the agencies of this Divine government.

A manifold variety, and a remarkable distribution of gifts and properties are combined for one great design. This is set forth in the various symbols employed in the description of the cherubim. In addition to the general likeness of a *man*, conveying the idea of a nature above the inferior orders of ani-

mated being, each face is the symbol of different qualities of mind and character. The face of a man is the sign of *intelligence* and *wisdom*; that of the lion, the established type of *power* and *courage*; the face of the ox illustrates the *strength put forth in patient and persevering effort*; the eagle's face is the emblem of what is *ardent, and penetrating, and elevating, in moral sublimity and devotion.* The *feet, hands,* and *wings* are respectively emblematical of *stability, action, and motion.* All these are illustrative first of the characteristics of the holy angels, who are pure and perfect intelligencies, possessing invincible courage, and untiring perseverance, and holy elevation—fixed in their purpose—active in their service, swift in the execution of all the designs of the Most High! And analogous, though, in degree, inferior, attributes are possessed by redeemed and sanctified men. Contemplate the intelligence and sagacity of Moses, the power and courage of David, the patience and perseverance of Abraham and Job, the ardour and devotion of Isaiah and Daniel. Or behold in the boldness of Peter, the enduring patience of James, the wondrous combination of almost every angelic quality in Paul, in the devotion and love of John, the same properties of sanctified agency. And in every age of the Church we have cherubim, ministers of light, and seraphim, ministers of love. We cannot think of Luther's courage, and Calvin's penetration, and Melancthon's charity, and Baxter's patience, and Howe's devotion, and Whitefield's rapid and eagle-like movements, without beholding the God of nature and the God of grace.

II.—The *harmony* of the operations of the Divine government.

Every view of nature must impress the mind with the conviction of the harmonious working of physical causes and materia agencies. In the order and general movements of the universe there is *constant revolution, ceaseless progression,* perfect regularity and undeviating harmony amidst all that may seem involved and complicated. And "the wheels are full of eyes,"

every motion is directed by one supreme and presiding intelligence. There is likewise harmony and co-operation in the *moral* world, in the world of *mind.* Although sin has produced confusion, there is a plan of infinite wisdom which secures results even from the mysterious permission of moral evil, which shall terminate in the manifestation of the Divine glory. The vision, however, points more specifically to the actual co-operation of holy beings in effecting the purposes of the Divine government. However varied their agencies, and under some aspects apparently opposed to each other, God will render all efficaciously subservient to the final and glorious result.

III.—The subjection of the entire system, as thus illustrated, to the power and dominion of the Redeemer.

The Son of God reigns over all events, over all agencies, and "He must reign" till all His enemies become His footstool; for He is exalted far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that also which is to come. "He has power over all flesh." Even in the weakness of His humiliation, he proved His supremacy over the laws of nature and the elements of matter. The universe of spirit is under His dominion, and that dominion is felt in hell, and glorified in heaven, and is the ground of confidence to all the people of God. Learn, then

1. To rejoice in the certainty of the Redeemer's triumphs.

2. The blessedness of those who have the Mover of all things for their Friend.

3. The danger of resisting and opposing the government of the Son of God.

4. The duty and privilege of co-operation with all holy beings in the service of the Redeemer.—*Dr. J. Fletcher.*

EZEKIEL, BY VARIOUS SYMBOLIC ACTS, FORETELLS THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM.

"*Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem,*" *etc.*—Ezekiel iv. chapter.

It is supposed by many commentators that all the actions spoken of in this parable took place only in vision. It is affirmed that such actions as are described here, though fitted when past, and rehearsed as things actually done, to make a strong impression, would have awakened a ludicrous feeling in the minds of spectators who saw them actually performed. Then, again, it is certain that it was physically impossible for Ezekiel to lie in one position for 390 days, and to eat bread prepared in such a manner as is here described, would be a violation of the law of Moses. This view is taken by Fairbairn and others. On the other hand, it is difficult to see what effect the simple rehearsal of such a vision would have had upon the minds of Ezekiel's countrymen. Henderson considers that the acts were actually performed. Leaving this an open question, we observe that we have

I.—A reflection in the present, of the historic past of the Israelitish nation.

Ezekiel's lying bound by God upon his left side for 390 and 40 days is considered by many commentators (Hitzig, Fairbairn, etc.) to refer back to the days of bondage in Egypt and of wandering in the wilderness. The people were to look back to the days of old and recall the "hole of the pit whence they had been digged" (Isa. li. 1). It is needful to be reminded of past troubles and deliverances in order to quicken feelings of humility and dependence in the present. The sailor who has once been delivered from the rocks should look back to it as a warning against false security and fool-hardiness in the future. The man who has recovered from one serious attack

of sickness ought to recall his past deliverance in order to avoid transgressing the laws of health in the future. Such a recall of the past is especially good in relation to our spiritual life. (See Rom. vi. 17; 1 Cor. vi. 11, etc.)

II.—A reflection in the present of the immediate future of the nation.

The first sign sets forth unmistakably the coming siege of Jerusalem. The prophet is commanded to direct his face towards the city to intimate the preparedness of the enemy to conduct it (so Henderson); and his bared arm is as that of a warrior, for the purpose of fighting, stripped of his garment up to the shoulder. The prophet's food and the measured quantity which he was to eat, graphically sets forth the suffering of the inhabitants of a besieged city, and probably also refers to the circumstances of the captives in the heathen land, when they were reduced to extreme want and obliged to have recourse to the most objectionable methods of cooking their food.

III.—Inquire why the past and future were brought thus before the Jewish captives in parabolic, rather than in plain words.

In propounding a difficult riddle to any number of persons, it will be found that only those who are, to some extent, quick of intellectual perception will feel any interest in seeking to solve it. If a difficult piece of dictation is given to the pupils of a large school where there is a great diversity of intellectual ability, only those who are apt will feel any interest in trying to write down the spoken words. This truth is exemplified all around us. The mysteries of the natural world are entirely passed over by most men; the parable of creation attracts only those whose spiritual eyes have been somewhat opened. So among the captives to whom Ezekiel prophesied there would be some who had lost all spiritual perception, whose soul-ears were heavy, and who had shut their eyes (Isa. vi. 10). To such every message of God would only bring an increase of guilt from rejection. But there were many others who were

not so utterly lost, in whom such a spectacle would awaken inquiry, and whose impressions would be deepened by the effort to get the hidden meaning. The reason of God's method here is given in Our Lord's answer to His disciples' question, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said . . . . . because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not . . . . . For whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." (Matt. xiii. 10, 16). "The form of teaching which repelled the stupid, and passed unheeded and misunderstood by the unholy, roused susceptible minds to deeper thought." "Christ's parables were intended to spur men's mind to profounder thought, to awaken the Divine consciousness within, and so teach them to *understand* that which at first served as a mental stimulus. Thus they served to sift the throng of Christ's hearers" (Neander). These remarks apply also to Old Testament parabolic teaching.

Lessons.

I.—That the parabolic revelation of the past and the future disclose God's action to be guided by the same laws at both periods. God has nothing new to say in relation to character. He has no new principle of action to reveal in connection with His moral government. The same conduct on the part of men will call forth the same kind of dealing on the part of God in every country and in every age. There had been a moral necessity for the Egyptian bondage, the repetition of the necessity would bring similar dealing. Those who think that God will not punish sin must first have made up their minds that he intends to act upon new principles in the future. History is against the supposition that God is too merciful to visit iniquity with punishment. When Jehovah proclaimed Himself as "abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," He likewise declared that He "will by no means clear the

guilty, etc." (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). Men's present sense of guilt and anticipation of future retribution, even when they are not suffering the penalty of human law, or when they *have paid* that penalty, is a proof that God's principle of action now is what it ever was.

II.—The best men in a community, in a certain sense, bear the iniquity of the worst. Ezekiel bore the iniquity of Israel, and goodness in a human soul often makes it a sin-bearer in this sense. The Christian mother is weighed down with a sense of her child's ungodliness, and the minister feels the burden of his hearers' indifference to the message of God. Jeremiah was more "hurt for the hurt of the daughter of his people" than she was herself (Jer. viii. 21). Paul wept for the enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. iii. 18). And the Divine Son of God in this sense, as in a far higher and deeper one, bare the sins of the nation to which He belonged (Luke xix. 41).

Notes upon the symbols used in this chapter. Henderson says that the bricks which abound in the ruins of Babylon are frequently two feet long by one in breadth. Many of them have impressions of various objects represented on them, and Ezekiel would find them suitable for the purpose of pourtraying a besieged city. With reference to the command in verses 12 and 15 he remarks that "it is customary with the Arabs and Tartars to this day, as it is in some parts of Europe where there is a scarcity of other fuel, to use the dried dung of cattle for the purpose of heating their ovens." *Kiel* says: "The iron pan, erected as a wall, is to represent neither the wall of the city nor the enemy's rampart, for this was already depicted on the brick; but it signifies a firm impregnable wall of partition, which the prophet as the messenger and representative of God raises between himself and the beleaguered city."

SELECTED—I.

The Lord deals with His people not only by His Word, but

also by signs and types. He speaks by the rainbow in the heavens. Circumcision, the paschal lamb, the high priest's garments, the stones in Aaron's breast, the sprinkling of things with blood, did all signify and type out something to the people. The word effects the ear ; types and figures effect the eye, and carry a greater efficacy than plain and simple speech. Hence the goodness of the Lord in using them.

II.—God's appointment and authority make things and actions, mean and ridiculous in the eyes of the world, to be weighty and of great use. To carnal reason some of the actions of the prophet here seem childish. But the legal worship, if you look upon it in itself, seems strange, and the bread, wine, and water in the Lord's supper and baptism, seem mean things and common to the world, but God's appointment makes all the difference. That which is contemptible in the eye of man is honourable and efficacious when commanded by God.

III.—God sends out His declarations before He causes destructions.

This deed of the prophet would quickly be at Jerusalem, and so might be a warning unto them. God sends out the lighting before He thunders, He frowns before He smites, and gives tokens of His coming wrath before He executes it.

IV.—Men's punishment is in conformity to their sin. Israel had sinned in excess, and God would take away their plenty. (Hos. xiii. 6). "According to their pasture, so were they filled ;" they forgot God in their fulness, and He made them remember Him in famine. They sinned in defiling themselves with idols, and offered meal and oil, honey and flour, for a sweet savour to their idols (Ezek. xvi.), and now they must eat polluted bread among the Gentiles.—*Greenhill.*

SELECTED—II.

Jerusalem in a state of siege represents God's covenant

people as a whole, straitened and oppressed by the powers of the world as the instruments of God's just displeasure. And the prophet being appointed to bear, during its continuance, the iniquity of its people, with stinted and foul provisions, points in another form, to the same visitation of evil, only with a more particular respect to the cause from which it was to spring and the penal character it should wear. That the time specified should have been in all 430 years, denoted that the dealing was to form a kind of new Egyptian exile and bondage to the elements of the world ; but much more so in the case of the one house than the other. The house of Israel having cast off nearly all that was distinctive in the position and privileges of the covenant people, they had consequently sunk to a condition of greatest danger, and they might expect to be bruised and crushed to the dust as under the rod of Egypt. But Judah was not so far gone, so that her subjection to the powers of evil was only to be like the time of chastisement and trial in the wilderness, out of which she might again emerge into a state of peace and blessing (chap. xx. 35-38.)—*Fairbairn.*

THE SWORD USED AS A RAZOR.

"*And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thy hair and on thy beard,*" *etc.*—Ezek. v. 1-4.

Verse 1 should be, "take thee a sharp sword *as* a barber's razor," *i.e.*, use a sword for the purpose of shaving off the hair.

Notice—

I.—The fitness of the person here chosen to represent the holy city.

Ezekiel symbolised the city of Jerusalem (verse 5). Ezekiel was one who was, in a special sense, set apart to the service

of God. The Hebrew priest was recognised by God as His representative in the midst of his nation. This priest was also a prophet; he had therefore been ordained by God to be the medium of Divine instruction in another form beside that of the ordinary Levitical service. He had therefore been placed in a position of double honour in relation to his countrymen, and, as his position was compared with theirs, so was the place among the nations which God had called Jerusalem to occupy. Her special charge was to minister to Him in the way which He had appointed, and to be a light to other nations by making known to them the character of the true God. Her natural situation was to be typical of her moral pre-eminence. She was designed, in a moral sense, to be a city set upon a hill. "I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her" (verse 5).

II.—The fitness of the action of the prophet to represent the coming judgment of Jerusalem.

The shaving of the hair and beard of a priest was forbidden (Lev. xxi. 5). It would therefore symbolise his desecration from his priestly office. While a Nazarite stood in special relation to God "no razor" was to come upon his head (Numb. vi. 5), when he shaved his head it denoted that the peculiar relation in which he had been standing towards God had ceased. The action of the prophet denoted, (1) that Jerusalem was to lose her position of honour as God's priest and servant. 2. The division of the hair into three parts and their treatment sets forth the destruction of a third of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege, the death of many more by the sword of their enemies, and the scattering of the remnant. But (3) the binding of a few in the skirts of the prophet's garment points to the escape and preservation of a few of the fugitives.

LESSONS.

I.—God's displeasure does not unsettle His judgment. The

hair was divided and "weighed in scales." Man's displeasure often renders him incapable of rightly judging those who have offended him. His anger makes him like one who is under the influence of disease, and who cannot therefore hold a balance steadily and weigh correctly. But with God it is not so. He "rendereth to every man according to His work," (Psa. lxii. 12). He weighs men in scales held by a steady hand.

II.—That punishment will be in proportion to the privileges which have been abused. "Because thou hast defiled my *sanctuary* with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations, therefore will I also diminish thee; neither shall mine eye" spare, neither will I have any pity (verse 11). Human laws punish more severely a breach of public trust than they do the same offence committed by a private person. If a man who is engaged to keep the peace of a city breaks it, his punishment ought to be heavier than that of an ordinary citizen. Those who squander a nation's wealth deserve more censure than those who waste their own private property. Jerusalem had been entrusted with a mission to the world, therefore her guilt was deeper and her retribution heavier.

III.—That, in the Divine government, physical *destruction* is intended to be the means of moral *instruction.* Paul speaks of a member of the Corinthian Church being delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved (1 Cor. v. 5). The outward and temporal ruin of Israel was intended to save a spark of spiritual life in the nation, and give her again the opportunity of being blest herself and of blessing others.

SELECTED.

I.—The citizens are compared to the hair of a man's head and beard: 1. For their multitudes; they are numberless, and Jerusalem had multitudes in it of her own, and thither was a

conflux of all sorts from most parts. 2. Hair is an ornament, and people are the beauty and glory of a city. A city unpeopled is a head without hair. Some think that by the hair of the *head* the wise men of the city are figured out, and by the hair of the *beard*, the strong men.

II.—The shaving off this hair points to three things: 1. Great mourning (Job i. 20), (Ezra ix. 3). 2. Great disgrace (2 Sam. x). 3. Destruction. When hair is cut off, it falls to the earth and perishes; and when people are cut off from God, they perish. God would separate them from Jerusalem, from His worship, from His presence.

III.—The division of the hair denotes that they should not all fare alike, but the judiciary providence of God would proceed with some in one way, with some in another. The binding up of a few in the skirts typifies the few whom Nebuzaradan left (2 Kings xxv. 12-23), and those that escaped out of Egypt when the judgment fell there (Jer. xliv. 28). But of that remnant the prophet must take a parcel and burn; this was to represent the death of Gedaliah, who was left governor of those who were permitted to remain in Judea.

Learn,—

I.—It is God's privilege to appoint what instruments He pleases to execute His displeasure upon sinners. The prophet might not take what instrument he pleased, but that which God commanded.

II.—That in great judgments God of His infinite mercy spares some few. When all flesh had corrupted their ways, and a general flood was brought in, Noah and his family were saved. Lot was bound up in the skirt of God when Sodom was destroyed. No storm sinks all ships, no plague, famine, or war eats up all particulars. God left a few clusters after the vintage (Isa. i. 9). Yet,

III.—The few preserved in common calamity are not all godly. There was a wicked Ham in the ark, Lot's daughters were none of the best, those who were set free from the bondage of Egypt perished through unbelief.—*Greenhill.*

THE MAN WITH THE INK-HORN, THE COALS OF FIRE, ETC.

"*And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter-weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen with a writer's ink-horn by his side. . . . . And He spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city, etc.*"—Ezekiel, chapters ix. and x.

In these two chapters and in the one preceding it we have what may be termed a dramatic vision consisting of three acts or representations, the first being an introduction to the other two, and revealing the cause of the events symbolised in them. It unfolds the nature of the crimes which were to be visited with the judgments set forth in the parabolic language of chapters ix. and x. The prophet is carried in vision to the temple at Jerusalem and witnesses the various forms of idolatrous worship which were still being carried on there, notwithstanding all the warnings and the chastisements of Jehovah. He there sees the statue or image of Astarte, the Syrian Venus, in the temple of Jehovah as it had been set up by Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 3-7). "This idol," says Henderson "arresting the attention of all who came to worship in the temple, claimed, as the rival of Jehovah, their adoration, on which account it is called *the image of jealousy* (ch. viii. 3). The position of this image, directly in front of God's own altar (ver. 5),

enhances the heinousness of the sin. The prophet is then shown what is generally supposed to have been a pictorial representation of Egyptian idolatries, into which the covenant-people had relapsed. "The hole in the wall marked the entrance to the chambers of imagery which had been blocked up in the time of Josiah, and which the prophet is now commanded to re-open, when he finds himself surrounded by pictured representations of Egyptian and other idolatrous deities." Those who worshipped in these chambers were the Seventy Elders, "originally a select body taken from the oldest and most judicious of the people, and therefore bound to suppress idolatry" (Num. xi. 16, 25). See Henderson. Then follows a view of Jewish women celebrating the Phœnician feast of *Tammuz*. Tammuz is considered to be identical with the Greek Adonis, the paramour of Venus, who, according to the fable, was killed by a wild boar, and was then obliged to spend half his life in the lower world. An annual festival was held in his honour, when the Syrian women, in token of grief for his disappearance, tore their hair and wept for several days, and then celebrated his return to the earth by rejoicings. All these rites were connected with the most licentious practices. The last revelation to Ezekiel is characterised as the greatest crime of all (ver. 15), because of the persons who committed it, and the place in which it was committed. The twenty-five men worshipping the sun are inferred to be the heads of the twenty-four courses of the priests, with the high priest at their head (1 Chron. xxiv. 18, 19), because they stood between the porch and the altar in the inner court of the Lord's house, where even the priests stood only on extraordinary occasions. The parable of vision which follows these descriptions is an enlargement of the first vision given to Ezekiel; here again we find the cherubim, the wheels, and the throne; but some details are given to the prophet now which were withheld upon the first occasion. When we first come out of a dark cell into the light of noon-day, we find that the light does not at first help us to see the objects around us,

but as our eyes become accustomed to the light, things that were dim and obscure become distinctly visible. So is it with the revelation of the mind of God and our soul-vision. When our Lord began His public ministry, He foretold in outline what He afterwards gave to His disciples in detail (John xvi. 25-29). His first teaching was less definite, because His hearers could not bear to be told all at once the details connected with the establishment of His kingdom. Ezekiel was lifted out of his ordinary condition into the supernatural light of God at the river of Chebar, and the sudden transition must have well-nigh blinded his soul-sight with the excess of the glory. And therefore the vision was of a general character. But now, from constantly dwelling in the light of the revelation of God, he was enabled to receive more definite intimations of the Divine plans in relation to His people. This vision, in parable, teaches—

I.—That in times of retribution God is a respecter of persons.

Among the men who are represented as drawing nigh to the doomed city with their destroying weapons in their hands, is one whose first commission is to "set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst of the city" (chap. ix. 4). A human ruler, if he is righteous, will not indiscriminately doom to punishment those who have been for him in the day of rebellion with the traitors who have striven to overthrow him. Nor will a just father subject to equal chastisement his obedient and his disobedient children. How much less possible is it that God should not separate in the day of visitation them that serve Him from them that serve Him not. Observe the *main characteristic* of those whom God thus respects in the day of retribution, they are in sympathy with God in His hatred of sin. That which was an abomination in God's sight was the occasion of their sighs and tears. That which causes men grief is a reflector of their heart, a true indicator of their feelings. When a vessel boils

over by reason of the heat underneath it the contents of the vessel will be known. These "elect of God," on account of their sympathy with Him, without doubt, cried "day and night unto Him" (Luke xviii., 7) concerning the iniquities of their people, and God hearkened, and heard, and spared them "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. iii. 17). Notice also the *special place where their election* to salvation was recorded, "set a mark over their *foreheads*." The face of a man is undoubtedly that part of his frame which reveals most of the life of the spirit within him, and therefore is the most distinctive mark of his relationship to the "Father of spirits." The sealing of the forehead may indicate that their highest nature had been devoted to God, and their inward consecration was so manifested in their outward life that when the destroying messengers passed through the city they would have no difficulty in recognising them. Light is its own evidence, and, even when it is not powerful enough to scatter all the darkness by which it is surrounded, it can reveal its own distinctive existence from the darkness.

II.—That it is in character only that God is a respecter of persons.

To the executors of judgment the command came "Go through the city and smite . . . . . and *begin at my sanctuary*" (chap. ix. 6). If it is right to honour those to whom places of honour have been given, it is equally true that those who fill such places are under a double bond to be faithful to the trust imposed upon them by their position of honour, and that the violation of such a trust should be visited with the severest punishment. God acted upon this principle long before the temple and city of Jerusalem were set apart by Him as the centre of moral light. In heaven there were sons of God in high places of honour, but when they became rebels, judgment began even among those who stood nearest to the throne. And if God "spared not the angels that sinned," He will not spare human rebels against His authority, especially those to

whom it has been given to be leaders among men. The Jewish priesthood had been chosen by God to be His representatives to the nation as the nation was to represent Him to the world; they had betrayed their trust, and set at nought the honour to which He had called them, therefore "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter iv. 17; Mal. ii. 1-10).

III.—That the departure of God from a nation is the signal for the coming of judgment through His creatures.

"The glory of the Lord," that symbol of the Divine presence, removed first from its ancient dwelling-place over the mercy-seat (2 Sam. vi. 2, Psa. lxxx. 1) to the threshold of the temple (chap. ix. 3). Then it departed entirely from the temple (chap. x. 18), and finally abandoned the city altogether (chap. xi. 23). These successive steps revealed how unwilling was Jehovah to fulfil that which had been long ago foretold. "Behold this people will rise up and go a-whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land . . . and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, etc. (Deut. xxxi. 16, 17). But as the departure of the soul from the body leaves it entirely to the operation of those forces in nature which reduce it to ashes, so the departure of God from the doomed city left it a prey to the armies of Babylon, which are here personified in the six men with their weapons of destruction from the north. And as it was in this destruction of this ancient people and their city, so was it with the same city and people in after ages. How unwilling did the Son of God—who came to "His own and they received Him not"—how unwillingly did he leave the "house" of His people "desolate" (Luke xiii. 34, 35; xix. 41-44). "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways and live?" (Ezek. xviii. 23). "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter iii. 9).

SELECTED—I.

I.—The Lord looks upon the world with a discriminating eye. When He proceeds to judgment of cities, churches, people, kingdoms, He doth it judiciously, considerately. God and Christ are not ashamed of theirs in the worst times and the greatest dangers. The mark here set upon them is (1) a mark of *honour* and *observation*, indicating that they are highly esteemed by God Himself. 2. It is a mark of *preservation*, denoting their exemption from the common calamity. When a house is on fire the owners will be sure then to look after their jewels, and to take and make them up above all the rest. So God, when judgments are abroad, will have special care of His treasure (Matt. iii. 17).

II.—God's judgments are as extensive as sinners' sins. Holy places were wont to be refuges unto those that fled to them, but it was not so here. And they must slay not only *sanctuary* sinners, but *city* sinners also.

III.—Judgments are in the power of God alone. "He saith, Go, take fire." It is the Lord that creates the fire, keeps, and gives it out, when, by whom, and where He pleaseth; He had fire in store, He bids the man in linen take of it, and scatter it over the city. He takes it to Himself, "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil" (Isa. xlv. 7).

IV.—Those who faithfully execute commissions given them by God may faithfully and boldly give up their accounts to God. The man here clothed in linen had executed his commission to the full, and he could with cheerfulness and confidence come before the Lord and say, "I have done as Thou hast commanded me."

V.—There is no visible church but may fall and cease to be. Here was the only visible church in the world, and the glory departed from it, and quickly it became no church. I do not say

visible saints shall all fail, but visible churches may. And when the Lord goes, the protection and benefits a people have by His angels go. When the glory departed, the cherubim mounted up from the earth.—*Greenhill.*

SELECTED—II.

Notice—

I.—The conjunction of God's vengeance with His threats. As soon as God's command was issued, six men were at hand for obeying him. It was a sign of their readiness to execute His commands when they placed themselves before the altar.

II.—Even unbelievers make war under the direction of God, and do nothing except His will. The man clothed in linen was added to the Chaldeans, to put a bridle on them, lest they should rage promiscuously and without selection against the elect and the reprobate. Although, therefore, the Chaldeans gave the reign to their self-will, God here pronounces them under His hand just as if they were hired soldiers. They were ordered *to go behind the angel*. The grace of God precedes, to the safety of the pious; then He opened the gate, and made a way open for His wrath, long and wide.

III.—To God's angels belong the double duty of protecting the faithful and executing vengeance upon the unfaithful. The same person who marked the elect now scatters coal through the city.

IV.—That which has been a sign of favour may, by men's perversity, become a symbol of destruction. The perpetual fire which God had Himself once kindled upon the Jewish altar had been a sign of reconciliation, for sins were expiated by sacrifices, consumed by it, and therefore the fire on the altar had been, as it were, the people's life. But now, since His sacrifices and altar had been polluted, fire was to be the sign of death.—*Adapted from Calvin.*

EZEKIEL REMOVES HIS GOODS.

"And I did so as I was commanded; I brought forth my stuff by day, as stuff for captivity, and in the even I digged through the wall with mine hand; I brought it forth in the twilight, and I bare it upon my shoulder in their sight."—Ezek. xii. 7.

Notice,—

I.—What made this parable necessary.

It was a self-inflicted blindness. "Son of Man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not" (ver. 2). A wicked desire cherished in the mind against a law which is felt to be a good law will, in time, tend to blind the mind to the importance of the law. When the desire takes the form of word or action, the blindness is increased. A thicker bandage is bound over the moral sense, and when the desire and the action become habits of life, an established blindness results from constant and perverse opposition to a known law. This seems to be the thought expressed by God in relation to the character of the people who were with Ezekiel in captivity. They knew that Jerusalem had been deservedly doomed to destruction, yet, like Lot's wife, they were ever desiring to be back there, and their desire being contrary to the expressed will of God concerning them, and the rest of their nation, led them to attach little importance to the word of His prophet, and blinded them to the reality of the judgments that were to visit Jerusalem. Their indulged desire led them to rebellion of heart against the will of Jehovah, hence the parabolic action of the prophet.

II.—What the parabolic actions of Ezekiel signified.

They told the captives in Chaldea that those to whom they wished to return would soon be exiles themselves. That those who were still in Judea would soon be preparing "articles of removal," *i.e.*, those indispensable necessaries of

life which would be all that they would be able to bring with them into the strange land. The digging through the wall, the departure at twilight (or rather at night), the covering of the face, express the stealthy manner in which fugitives seek to avoid their enemies. It is expressly foretold that the "prince" of the people should flee in this manner (ver. 12), and in Jeremiah we learn that Zedekiah "fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls; and he went out by the way of the plain. But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho" (Jer. xxxix. 4).

The whole subject teaches us,

I.—That those who are morally blind must have such teaching as proclaims their blindness.

Blind people must learn to read from raised letters; when we see such a book we know for whom it is intended. The sense of sight being absent, thoughts must find entrance through another channel. The necessity of such an action on the part of Ezekiel proclaims the moral insensibility of the people to whom he addressed himself.

II.—The danger of cherishing desires contrary to the revealed will of God.

One blow given to the eye of the body will impair the sight to some extent, though it may be but slightly; a second may close the eye entirely, and repeated blows will probably bring incurable blindness. So with blows upon the moral sense.

III.—Human perversity is a mirror in which is reflected the patience of God.

When one method fails to impress men, He tries another. "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? it is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented. For

John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children" (Matt. xi. 16-19).

Note,—

The goods (or, outfit of exile), called in the text the "articles of removal," were a pilgrim's staff and traveller's wallet, with the provisions and utensils necessary for a journey. Ezekiel was to carry these out of the house into the street in the day-time, that the people might see them and have their attention directed to them. Then in the evening, after dark, he was to go out himself, not by the door of the house, but through a hole which he had broken in the wall. He was also to take the travelling outfit upon his shoulder, and carry it through the hole and out of the place, covering his face all the while, that he might not see the land to which he was going.—*Keil.*

It did not escape Ezekiel that this action would expose him to many jeers and reproaches. But he esteemed nothing of equal moment with pleasing God; hence we must remark the prophet's alacrity in obeying the Divine command. Since to ingenuous natures nothing is more distasteful than reproach, he might reject the burden imposed upon him because it exposed him to the laughter of others. But because God was otherwise pleased, he did as he was ordered.—*Calvin.*

THE VINE.

"*And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of Man, what is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xv.

This parable teaches,—

I.—The end of Israel's existence as a nation.

The purpose of planting a vine is to obtain fruit from it. However beautiful its foliage may be, the vine-dresser will be disappointed, and feel that all his care and toil have been thrown away, if, when the autumn comes, he sees no bunches of ripe grapes upon his tree. As with the fig-tree in our Lord's parable (Luke xiii. 6-9), which resembles the vine in this particular, he comes at the appointed time and seeks *fruit* because the end of planting a fruit-bearing tree is to obtain fruit. The end of calling Abraham from his native land and planting him in a new one was to make him that which he became, viz., a tree of righteousness, in other words, a holy man. This was the end for which his descendants were delivered from the bondage of Egypt. "He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness; and gave them the lands of the heathen, and they inherited the labour of the people, *that they might observe His statutes and keep His laws*" (Psa. cv. 45).

II.—That this end not having been realised, they were of less worth to the world than the heathen nations.

If a tree does not bear fruit, it may be useful to mankind in some other way. Its leaves may yield them medicine, or its trunk timber for building; even the bark of many trees is very useful. But the vine is worthless except for its fruit. Its stem will burn, certainly, but it is not of sufficient size to be valuable even as fuel, and as God here asks, "Shall wood be taken from it to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?" so the Hebrew nation, when it did not bear fruit unto God in obeying His commands, was of less worth in the world than the Gentile nations. They were not so advanced as the Egyptians in the knowledge and practice of the arts and sciences, and were inferior to other nations in military and naval greatness. As a nation of shepherds and agriculturists, their circumstances were most favourable for the reception of the thoughts of God, and for the formation of a spiritual character; but missing this, they missed their opportunity of blessing other nations, and because of their inferiority

in other respects, became an easy prey to the kings of Assyria and Babylon. "What is a vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch among the trees of the forest?"

III.—That in consequence of their worthlessness, they must suffer destruction as a nation.

In the judgment of a human vine-dresser, all that can be done with a useless vine is to commit it to the flames. When this is done, the branches are consumed first and very quickly, and the trunk, offering some resistance to the flames, is longer in being consumed. "The fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned." When the trunk is half consumed and charred, it is less profitable than before it was thrown into the flames. In the judgment of God, the Divine husbandman, there remained but one end for the fruitless vine of Israel. The nation had been doomed to the fires of invasion, famine, and captivity, and at this time had been partially consumed by them; that which still remained being like the blackened, half-burned trunk, which would shortly be reduced to ashes also. The flame of retribution had been kindled first in the northern portion of the kingdom, when "Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria, took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria" (2 Kings xv. 29.). The fire attacked the other extremity of the vine when Pharaoh-necho slew Josiah, king of Judah, and made his kingdom tributary to that of Egypt (2 Kings xxiii. 30, 35). And now the heart of the country and Jerusalem itself was in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and would soon be utterly wasted, and God asks the question, "Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work, how much less shall it be meet for any work when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned?"

IV.—The reason why Israel had not brought fruit.

The soil in which a vine is planted may be perfectly adapted

to the needs of the tree, and the care bestowed upon it by the husbandman may be skilful and unremitting, and yet, through some inherent badness in the plant, there may be no fruit. The care which had been bestowed upon Israel is set forth in Isaiah vi. God had done all that it was possible for even a Divine Power to do in surrounding the nation with influences favourable to the development of a godly character. But they had "committed a trespass" (ver. 8), they had forsaken the worship of the Living God, and had joined themselves to idols. This was the source of all their national sin. Having severed themselves from the source of spiritual life, they could not bring forth fruit. The words of Christ were applicable to them, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without (or severed from) me, ye can do nothing" (John xv. 5).

Lessons.

I.—Those who profess to know God claim, by that profession, to be superior in their character to other men. The profession of special knowledge among men is a claim to have something which those outside the profession do not possess. Israel professed to know God, and that very profession was a claim to a holier life than that of the Gentile nations. Paul argues from this principle, in 2 Cor. vi. 14-18, "What communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial? . . . Ye are the temple of the living God . . . *wherefore* come out from among them, and be ye separate," etc.

II.—The profession of Divine knowledge joined to the working of iniquity will bring a punishment for the false profession as well as a punishment for the iniquity. If a man professes to be a qualified medical practitioner when he is not, and kills his fellow-creatures by his unskilful treatment, he is liable to a double punishment. First, he must pay the

penalty of the law for the murder of his patient, and then for his false profession. It is upon false professors that Christ pronounced the doom, in Matt. vii. 22: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

III.—The greatness of a man or of a nation must come from within. No external advantages can make real greatness. Even God Himself cannot put a character *upon* a man, although He may surround Him with every influence favourable to the development of it.

SELECTED—I.

I.—Man is naturally capable of yielding a most precious fruit. This fruit consist in living unto God.

1. He is possessed of all the natural powers which are requisite for that purpose. He is endowed with reason and understanding, enabling him to entertain just, though inadequate conceptions of the principal attributes of His nature. Inferior animals have not these capabilities; on which account he is a vine tree among the trees of the wood; inferior in many properties to some of them, but superior in those particulars which fit him for this end, and on that account incomparably more valuable. 2. As we are possessed of natural powers, fitting us for the service of God, so He has bestowed upon us much care and culture, with an express view to this end. He gave to Israel His will, His ordinances, His prophets; He has done much more for us under the gospel.

II.—This is the only end for which mankind are formed and preserved; this is the proper fruit of human nature, which admits of nothing being substituted in its room.

1. A mere selfish, voluptuous life cannot be supposed to be the proper fruit of human nature. He who lives to himself is universally despised. "Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit to himself" (Hosea x. 1). 2. A life of social benevolence, in which the public good is preserved, without a

supreme regard to God, cannot be this fruit. For, first, to do good to our fellow-creatures, without regard to God, is to forget the principal relation in which we stand. A right behaviour to each other is no proper compensation for the want of obedient regards to God: instanced in pirates and rebels. Then, secondly, the end of man's existence cannot, with any propriety, be considered as confined to this world; but the proper end accomplished by mere social virtues, is entirely confined to the present state. Thirdly, no collective number of men can be independent of God, any more than a single individual; therefore no collective body has a right to consult its common interest to the neglect of God.

III.—He who answers not the end of his existence, is fit only to be destroyed.

The barren vine may be useful as fuel, and wicked men may be useful, with a subordinate kind of usefulness, by their destruction. They may become edifying examples of the just vengeance of God, in order to deter others (Isa. lxvi. 24). They will serve to manifest those attributes of the Great Supreme which their conduct disowned, and seemed virtually to call in question (Rom. ix. 22).—*Robert Hall.*

SELECTED—II.

This parable indicates in a very striking manner the strictly moral nature of the ends for which God chooses a people out of the world, and teaches them to expect, in immediate connection with these, all their security, and power, and glory. It is the same truth brought out by John the Baptist when he says, "And now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth forth not good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." The same also which our Lord teaches, in Matt. xxi. 33-41, Luke xiii. 6-9, and which He still further embodied in the parabolical action of the cursing the fruitless fig-tree by the wayside (Mark xi. 12-14). The truth is, therefore, for all times and changes of the Church's history. It

matters not that her members are now intermingled with the world, and not, as of old, placed in a state of visible separation and distance from it. They are still a chosen seed, distinguished with the highest privileges, and most elevating hopes, but all for the single end of withdrawing them from the pollutions of the world, and rendering them unto God a peculiar people zealous of good works. It is only by pursuing this high end with undeviating purpose and steady aim that they will prove themselves the appointed channels of conveying life and blessing to a perishing world.—*Fairbairn.*

SELECTED—III.

I.—God blesses and prospers a people that is fruitful in good (Gen. xlix. 22, xli. 44, Psa. i. 3, Deut. xxix. 9).

II.—All creatures are fruitful one way or another. And shall man be barren?

III.—It is the appointment of the Lord Christ, that those who are His servants should be fruitful (John xv. 16).

IV.—It is an honour and a delight to God to be fruitful (John xv. 8, Matt. v. 16, Psa. cxli. 2, Heb. xiii. 15).

V.—Fruitfulness is delightful to man (2 Cor. ix. 2).

VI.—Christ is coming to see what fruit there is upon His vine trees (Heb. x. 37).—*Greenhill.*

THE UNFAITHFUL WIFE.

"*Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem, Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite,*" *etc.*—Ezek. chap. xvi.

The parable sets forth the fact—

I.—That the Hebrew nation was brought into most intimate relations with Jehovah by an act of sovereign grace.

If a noble of the land finds a wretched infant by the roadside in helpless misery, and not only sees that it is rescued from death, but makes it a member of his own family, takes it into intimate relation to himself, and gives to it all the benefits which it would have inherited if it had been born his heir; such an adoption is an act of pure favour on his part. The leader of the Hebrew nation was found by the Egyptian princess in his infancy on the banks of the Nile, unable to help himself and doomed to death by the law of the land. Although it was an act of simple humanity to save him from perishing, it was an act of pure favour to adopt him as her son. So God here represents the Hebrew nation in its beginning as a helpless outcast child, and its election to be His covenant-people under the symbol of the most intimate relationship among men—the marriage-bond. His peculiar favour towards them is set forth in the contrast between the wretched infant, described in verses 4 and 5, and the bride clothed and adorned with tokens of her husband's love, in verses 10 to 14. It is obvious that this selection of Israel from all the other nations of the world was an act of God's unmerited favour.

II.—That this gracious act did not produce the conduct which might have been expected, but the very opposite.

The natural result of unmerited favour is gratitude where human souls are not utterly demoralised. Grateful feeling shows itself in acts of gratitude. Thus, the sinful woman who was pardoned by our Lord washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Though she had been greatly debased by a sinful life, she could appreciate the forgiving love of the Holy Saviour. But the Israelitish nation showed no gratitude for the unprecedented tokens of favour which they had received from God. But, on the contrary, the one aim of the nation appeared to be how most completely to sink to the level—and even below it—from which they had been raised; how most effectually to sever the bonds of love by which they had been surrounded. At the period when this

parable was spoken, the nation seems to have sunk far more deeply into idolatrous practices than when they were in Egyptian bondage. They had gone so far as to sacrifice their children in the fire to Moloch (ver. 21), and are represented as having gone beyond the Sodomites themselves in iniquitous practices (ver. 48), and to have disgusted the very heathen by whom they were surrounded by their exceeding wickedness (ver. 27). No parallel to such base ingratitude could be found except in the conduct of so unfaithful a wife as is here described, who sinned against such love as is set forth in the parable.

III.—That those for whose friendship Israel had forsaken God should be the witnesses and instruments of her punishment (verses 35-41).

Israel had not been satisfied with imitating the idolatries of her neighbours, she had gone into Chaldea in quest of new idols and new forms of idol worship (verse 28). And now they should be recompensed by being placed as captives among those idolators whose licentious practices they had emulated in the days of their freedom.

IV.—That the use of such instruments of chastisement should be the means of repentance and of a renewal of their former covenant with Jehovah.

Instances are not wanting in human life in which the very abandonment of a man to drain to the dregs the cup of sin, to go to the extremity of all that he could conceive in licentious practices of any kind, has, by the very loathing which it has awakened, been the means of repentance. This seems to have been the method employed to bring Israel "to know that Jehovah was the Lord." The placing her in the midst of idolators was the means of curing her proneness to idolatry, and, as a consequence, of restoring her to her ancient relationship and favour. "Thou shalt remember thy ways and be ashamed . . . . . and I will establish my covenant with

thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord." That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

The general teaching for men in all ages is—

I.—That souls whose characters have placed them at the greatest distance from God can be brought into covenant relation with him. God has a plan, or method of working, by which he brings summer and winter, day and night; this plan is called by Him a covenant (Jer. xxxiii. 5). "If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth." While the earth and sun keep their appointed way, they are within the bonds of the covenant, but if we conceive for the sake of illustration, that the laws which govern day and night might at some time be broken, and the earth slip the cable which binds her to the sun, and drift out of the covenant which God has established, could not God re-establish the old order of things? The question is its own answer. Man was, at his first setting out in life, in covenant relation with his God; but having broken through the laws of that covenant, he has drifted far from his original position. Cannot God find a way to bring him back to his old relationship and his old standing? When Israel broke her covenant with her God and strayed so far from her original destiny as this parable pictures, God found a way to restore her. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant they brake, although I was a husband to them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and

they shall be my people" (Jer. xxxi. 31-33). And as Jehovah found a way to bring a nation back, so has He, by the gospel of Christ, made a way by which the whole world may again be united to Him in covenant relationship. See the unfolding of the plan in Romans x. 4-13. Behold the "shall be" of verse 13 an accomplished fact in Ephes. i. 13, ii. 1-22. For the means of keeping within the bonds of the covenant, see Heb. iv. 14 and 16, 1 John ii.

II.—That faithfulness to covenant relationship is esteemed by God as a *front-rank* attribute of character. It is so regarded by men. Many faults may be overlooked, but covenant-breakers are universally condemned. God here selects from all the covenants among men that one in which unfaithfulness is the most shameful in itself and terrible in its consequences. And while the use of it shows the guilt of departure from God, it likewise sets forth the willingness of God to bind Himself to man by the most sacred and inviolable bonds.

III.—The result of affliction for sin ought to be a double pacification. "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God (verse 63). The severe measures which the schoolmaster has to use towards his pupil sometimes will not bring peace to the mind of either of those concerned. But the result of them in after years may make amends to both, although the pupil may feel shame at the thought that his conduct rendered such treatment necessary. The soul that is sunk in sin must be made to feel the pain which will awaken a sense of guilt; God takes no pleasure in the infliction of the pain, but He is, in the words here used, "pacified" when the result of sorrow is "the fruit of righteousness" (Heb. xii. 11). Upon the common ground of pacification the pardoning God and the pardoned sinner meet.

SELECTED—I.

The day of the birth of Israel was the period of its sojourn in

Egypt, where Israel as a nation was born,—the sons of Jacob who went down into Egypt multiplied into a nation. The Canaanitish descent points to the moral depravity of the nature of Israel; and the neglected condition of the child is intended to show how little there was in the heathen surroundings of the youthful Israel in Canaan and Egypt that was adapted to foster its life and health, or to educate Israel and fit it for its future destination. The description of what God had done for Israel in His compassionate love is divided into two sections by the repetition of the phrase, "I passed by thee" (verses 6 and 8). The first embraces what God had done for the preservation and increase of the nation; the second, what He had done for the glorification of Israel by adopting it as the people of His possession. Verse 7 (last clause) should be rendered "Still thou wast naked and bare." In Egypt, Israel was living in a state of nature, destitute of the gracious revelations of God. "I swore to thee," *sc.* love and fidelity (see Hosea ii. 21, 22), and entered into a covenant with thee, *i.e.*, that gracious connection formed by the adoption of Israel, as the connection of Jehovah. The anointing with oil indicates the power of the Spirit of God, which flowed to Israel from the covenant of grace. The royal dignity conferred (ver. 12) includes both the call to Israel to be a kingdom of priests and the historic realization of this call through the Davidic sovereignty.

The beauty, *i.e.*, the glory of Israel, led to its fall, because it made it the ground of its confidence (ver. 12), that is to say, it looked upon the gifts and possessions conferred upon it as its desert (Deut. xxxii. 15; Hosea xiii. 6). In verses 16–19, Israel is represented as giving up to idolatry all that it had received from God. Under the figure of whoredom, the inclination of Israel to heathen ways in all its extent, both religious and political, is embraced. Egypt stands first; for the apostasy of Israel commenced with the worship of the golden calf, and the longing in the wilderness for the fleshpots of Egypt. God punished this conduct by diminishing the supply of food, etc.,

that is to say, He did not permit it to acquire undisturbed possession of Canaan, but gave it up to the power of the Philistines (ver. 27). Israel committed adultery with Asshur from the time of Ahaz (2 Kings xvi. 7), and increased it to Chaldea (ver. 29). Two things are mentioned as constituting the first ground of punishment. Ver. 36 should be, "because thy brass was poured out," etc. To the squandering of the possessions bestowed by the Lord, there was added the disgraceful sacrifice of their honour and dignity. The heathen, as a punishment, will destroy all the objects of idolatry and leave her naked, *i.e.*, plunder Jerusalem and lay it waste.—*Keil.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—The Lord shows mercy to men when they are in desperate conditions. The Lord hath said, "Live," when men have been on the brink of eternal destruction. The thief on the cross met with life at the gates of death; and so the jailer (Acts xvi).

II.—God not only gives life to His people, but provision of food and clothing afterwards (verses 10-13). "Thou hast adorned us, we will adore Thee; Thou hast clothed, girded, shod us, and decked us from the head to the feet, we will see that the whole and every part may be serviceable to Thee."

III.—It is a most detestable thing to abuse the mercies God gives us to the dishonour of His name (verse 15).

When we thus pervert His blessings, we cross the aim of God, wound His honour, darken His glory, and destroy ourselves.

IV.—Consideration of our miserable estate by nature, and of God's mercy, is of special help to prevent sin.

"Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth" (verse 22). When David had sinned, the prophet reminds him of his former condition, and of what God had done for him (2 Samuel xii. 7).

V.—However men forget and break their covenants, God will not forget His (verse 60).

He is revealed as "the faithful God, which keepeth covenant" (Deut. vii. 9). If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. ii. 13). However the creature prove, God doth things upon the account of His faithfulness. "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. v. 24).—*Greenhill.*

THE TWO EAGLES, THE VINE, AND THE CEDAR-BRANCH.

"*And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel; And say, thus saith the Lord God; a great eagle with great wings, long winged, full of feathers which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xvii.

Four kings and their kingdoms are brought before us in this parable, each possessing points of contrast to all the others, yet having something in common with the rest. First, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon; the great eagle of verse 3, full of strength, in the height of his power and ruling over many nations, expressed in the length of his wing, the fulness of his plumage as yet exhibiting no signs of decay, and the variety of the colours of his feathers. The second eagle, mentioned in the 7th verse, represents the king of Egypt; he is also a large bird, but his length of wing is not so great nor is he so full of feathers as the first eagle, indicating that Egypt had passed her prime, that signs of decay might be detected in her, that her dominion was not so extensive as that of Babylon. Zedekiah, the vassal king of Judah, is the vine of low stature planted by the first eagle

(verses 4-6), which is soon plucked up by the roots, and becomes a withered and lifeless trunk—a prophecy of the fate that was awaiting that covenant-breaking king (verses 18-21; Jer. lii. 8-11). Then we have mention made of a king whose kingdom is to be set up in the future, who is to be a descendant of the kings of Judah, but who is to be greater than the greatest of the other kings mentioned, inasmuch as "all fowl of every wing shall dwell in the shadow of the branches thereof" (verse 23). Under the similitude of a "young and tender twig," planted "in the mountain of Israel," and growing into "a goodly cedar," the establishment of the kingdom of Christ is foretold in terms which at once remind us of the prophecy of Isaiah, "And there shall come forth a rod (or shoot) out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots . . . . And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah xi. 1-12). All the persons here brought before us have this in common, viz., they are all kings, but there is a great difference in their positions and in the extent of their dominions. Nebuchadnezzar's dominion was much more extensive than that of the king of Egypt. Zedekiah only held his position by the permission of the king of Babylon, while the King of the fourth kingdom is "King in His own right" of all the kingdoms of the world. Except that He partakes of human nature, and that He is a ruler of men in this world, He has nothing in common with any of the others. He is a contrast to the first because He rules over only willing subjects; to the second, inasmuch as His power is always exercised to *further*, never to *frustrate*, the Divine purposes (verse 17); and to the third, because He is pre-eminently the covenant-*keeper*, both in relation to His Divine Father and His human brethren. "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Psalm xlv. 2).

Let us consider—

I.—The special lessons which the parable was intended to teach the Jewish nation.

1. The utter powerlessness of the alliance which Zedekiah had formed with Pharaoh to avert the subjugation of the kingdom of Judah to that of Babylon. Zedekiah had been placed upon his brother's throne by Nebuchadnezzar himself (2 Kings xxiv. 17), who had "made him swear by God" an oath of fidelity to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13). This oath Zedekiah had broken, trusting by the help of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to free himself from Assyrian dominion, although God had expressly warned him of the uselessness of such efforts (Jer. xxxvii. 1-10). Hence the declaration of verse 17, "Neither shall Pharaoh, with his mighty army and great company, make for him in the war," etc.

2. That God's displeasure against Zedekiah was especially directed to his breaking covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. "Seeing he despised the oath by *breaking the covenant*, when, lo, he hath given his hand, and hath done all those things, he shall not escape. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head" (verses 18, 19). An oath is among all nations considered the most solemn form of speech. This is the case even when heathen swear by their false gods. The breaking of a promise made under such circumstances would be esteemed among them as a crime. How much more flagrant, then, was the sin when the king of a nation who professed to be servants of Jehovah broke a covenant made with an idolator in God's name. Contempt would thus be brought upon the character of the God of Israel unless He punished the transgressor who had thus taken "His name in vain."

3. But, lest the pious Jews should feel as though their nation was doomed to utter destruction, the parable concludes by pointing onward to a new and better state of things. The vine planted by Nebuchadnezzar should become a withered

and useless stump in the person of Zedekiah, but God "would pluck a slender twig from the same lofty cedar, which had previously been pluckt by the king of Babylon ; that is, a scion of the house of David, to which the kingdom belonged by everlasting covenant, of no new or secondary formation, but in the old, direct, and proper line" (*Fairbairn*). And so those whose hearts were sad at the present aspect of the chosen people were bidden to hope for a glorious revival in the future.

II.—The lessons contained in the parable for men of every nation and time.

1. That inequality among men must bring the submission of some to others. This inequality may spring from something in *personal character.* One man may have more intelligence, more ruling power than another, and his fellow-men may submit to him as naturally as the willow bows before the wind. Or the *position* of one man may carry with it so much more of external force that submission may spring from what the man *has* when it does not spring from what he *is.* Submission for a time may sometimes be the best possible course for one who finds himself unable to meet another on equal ground. He may, in such a case, be as really called to such a course as Zedekiah was at this time, although he will not receive the Divine command in so direct a manner.

2. That liberty purchased by transgression is the freedom that leads to a deeper bondage. A child enjoys a certain and lawful freedom when he is submitting to the rule of a teacher who is just. By playing truant he attains, for a time, a greater measure of freedom, but it will be followed by an increased restraint. The lawful freedom will bring enjoyment with it, the lawless freedom will be followed by penalty. Zedekiah could have enjoyed a certain amount of freedom if he had been content with the position which God would have permitted him to hold, but when he trespassed against God in order to gain more, he brought himself into a condition of

bondage far heavier than that which Nebuchadnezzar had originally imposed upon him. "He also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13). "So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon, at Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him. And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon" (2 Kings xxv. 7). It is the highest self-deception for any man to imagine he can attain to greater liberty by the committal of sin against the law of his God. He may not be undeceived for a long time, but he will certainly learn, sooner or later, that what may seem a pleasant expedient at present will bring a future hell, when he is bound in heavier chains than those he thought to escape. (Comp. Gen. iii. 5, 17-24.)

3. Those who, professing to be the children of God, deal falsely with the children of the world, shall have a *double* punishment for the *single* transgression. If Nebuchadnezzar had broken covenant with Zedekiah, he would have been judged from a different stand-point from that whence Zedekiah was judged. The heathen are judged by "the law written in their hearts" only (Rom. ii. 15). But Zedekiah sinned against more light; his use of the name of Jehovah implied that he professed to be His servant, and God therefore speaks of him as having dishonoured the Divine name as well as his own. "Surely *mine* oath that he hath despised, and *my* covenant that he hath broken" (verse 19). So God regards every unrighteous act committed by those who profess to serve Him, and consequently visits them, not merely for the act itself, but for the insult offered to His Name.

4. All human kingdoms exist for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. The earthly body exists for the soul; when the soul has completed its earthly course the body will be removed and the soul stand alone. The scaffolding stands until the house is finished, and is then taken down because it has fulfilled

the purpose of its erection. The end of all earthly kingdoms is to furnish a body in which the *one* kingdom can find a home in which to develope itself. The kingdom of Christ in the world is the world's *soul;* like the soul of man, it is of another essence than that of which the body is composed. The kingdoms of the world are the scaffolding surrounding "the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." Egypt and Assyria and Babylon were all made to serve the purposes of God towards Judah, and the Jewish kingdom was only kept in existence until the "fulness of time" was come; and all the modern nations are but existing for the completion of that kingdom whose subjects are to be gathered out of "all nations, and kindred, and peoples and tongues" (Rev. vii. 9).

5. Christ's kingdom is so long in coming because it is to be so long in duration. Things that are renowned for strength and durability generally take a long time to grow. The mushroom comes to perfection in a single night, but the foot of a child can crush it in much less time than it took to grow. The giant trees of the world have taken longer to grow than some human kingdoms, but they have outlived lines of kings and the kingdoms themselves. The kingdom to which we belong has taken a thousand years to become what it is to-day, but we rejoice in its present strength and trust that it will not be destroyed until time shall be no longer. The kingdom of God seems to grow slowly, but it is to be "without end." "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and *it shall stand for ever*" (Dan. ii. 44). "And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and *of His kingdom there shall be no end*" (Luke i. 33).

SELECTED—I.

"The Tree-Christ which God hath prepared for us, (1) as to its nature, (2) as to its destiny.—Summer and winter the

cedar is green, and never loses its leaves or its verdure. The everlastingly green Tree of Life is Christ. No wood is more durable; so Christ is the indestructible foundation for our hopes, etc. We are the branches of the cedar of God. Our fruits are Christ's, who produces them in us and by us. John and Peter, Paul and James—what boughs in that Cedar! and the fathers and the reformers, and all believers since, what a Tree! What a green flourishing, fruit-laden array of branches that which sways around it! What a mighty, densely foliaged, far-shadowing crown! and in the crown what gales, and zephyrs, and rustlings of holy life and divine love! Here there is nothing promised to Christ and His cause less than final triumph over the whole world. The pompous glory of Babylon, Egypt, Rome, and Athens, where is it to be found?" —*Krummacher.*

SELECTED—II.

The advantage of the kingdom of Christ in the shaking of the kingdoms of the world (verses 22-24).

I.—In the midst of all the tumults and embroilment of the nations, that which the Lord takes, peculiarly as His own design, into His own management, is the carrying on of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. "You are about your work," saith the Lord, "I am also about mine; you have your branches and cedars, I also have one to plant, that shall flourish." Doubtless, all the kingdoms mentioned in this chapter were also of His setting up, but He speaks about them as if He had nothing to do with them (Dan. ii. 21, 44).

II.—Among all the designs that are on foot in the world, there is none that hath either stability, fixedness, or final success, but only the design of God concerning the kingdom of Christ. Other branches may be set, but the branch of the Lord only prospers (Hag. ii. 6, 7). The interest of Christ is like Joseph (Gen. xlix. 23, 24). Oft-times the archers shoot

at it, and grieve it; but in the close the bow abides in strength, his sheaf standing up, and all others bowing down thereto.—*John Owen, D.D.*

THE LIONESS AND HER WHELPS AND THE TRANSPLANTED VINE.

"*Moreover take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say, What is thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions,*" *etc.* —Ezek. xix.

The parables of this chapter refer exclusively to the sins of the princes of Judah and the inevitable consequences of those sins. The lion is here used as emblematical of them, not, as in some other parts of Scripture, on account of his courage and supposed nobility of nature (Gen. xlix. 9), but rather in reference to his lawless and ungovernable indulgence in his own selfish desires, without regard to any will besides his own. One young lion, eager in pursuit of prey, would not be deterred from seeking to gratify his appetite because he saw another perish in the attempt. The two princes of Judah, whose arbitrary and reckless conduct is here depicted, are probably Jehoiahaz and Jehoiachin. Of the first, it is said that "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done. And Pharaohnechoh put him in bands at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem" (2 Kings xxiii. 32, 33). Verses 3 and 4 of the parable relate to this man's character and his fate: "It became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men. The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains unto the land of Egypt." Another young lion of the same family is then represented in the parable as following the same course and meeting

with a similar end, clearly pointing to the perverse persistence of Jehoiachin in the footsteps of his predecessors (2 Kings xxiv.), and to his capture by Nebuchadnezzar, who carried him captive to Babylon. The figure then changes; a vine, chief of the fruit-bearing trees, is introduced as an emblem of the royal house of Judah as a whole. Her favoured position is noticed: "she was planted by the waters," then the power and glory of the early monarchs; "she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule, and her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height in the multitude of her branches." The present position of her princes is then placed in contrast with the former glory in verse 13, and the lamentation is made that "fire is gone out of the rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit, so that she hath no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule, referring to Zedekiah's character and its consequences, as set forth in chapter xvii.

Lessons.

I.—That the continuance of a nation's *greatness* depends upon the continuance of her *godliness*. When the ribs of a vessel become rotten, the cargo will not be long in finding a resting-place in the bed of the ocean. There are laws at work which prevent the vessel's continuance upon the surface of the water. When the human frame is smitten with incurable disease, it will not need a very practised eye to foretell dissolution at no distant date. The godliness of a nation is the framework by which the ship of state is held together; the nation that does not, to some extent, love truth and work righteousness must sooner or later go to pieces, and be buried beneath the waves of time. The lack of moral health in the body politic will soon manifest itself in lack of strength, and if the disease is not arrested, the nation may hire a Gibbon to record her decline and fall. There are laws at work which will it render it impossible for her to hold her place among the nations. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve

Thee shall perish; yea, those nations be utterly wasted" (Isa. lx. 12).

II.—That royal families are God's tenants at will. There are families bearing rule in Europe whose members have swayed a sceptre for centuries. There are descendants of other kings who have now none of the power and influence which was once the heritage of their fathers. In this parable both may find the reason of their present positions. Thrones are let on lease by God—"by Me kings reign" (Prov. viii. 15)—and the tenants are removed when they utterly fail to fulfil the end for which rule has been given to them. "The most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and appointeth over it whomsoever He will" (Dan. v. 21). The charge against the man to whom Daniel addressed these words was, "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified," and the consequent penalty is therefore pronounced: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it" (Dan. v. 23, 26).

III.—That though sinners may begin in a major key, they will end in a minor. The drunkard may feel in high spirits while the first influence of the intoxicating cup is upon him, but a few hours brings the miserable re-action. Sin of any kind is a wine whose indulgence gives a certain kind of pleasure; but a change of key must come, and the song of exultation be changed for a lament. The great king who found delight in the indulgence of lawless passion (2 Sam xi.) came down to the lament of the fifty-first Psalm. The rich man who rejoiced in his gorgeous apparel and in his sumptuous feasts, and disregarded the claims of his poorer brethren, came to bewail the consequences of his selfish indulgence (Luke xvi. 19-24). Zedekiah and Jehoiachin had found a pleasure in following the bent of their own inclinations, but the fruit of it is "a lamentation" (verses 1. 14).

SELECTED—I.

The "how" of verse 2 is an exclamation of surprise at the

former glory, which, as this glory is now vanished, is in reality a bitter lament. The address is to the man Judah, the people of the present. The mother is the people in itself. The people appears as a lioness upon the ground of Gen. xlix. 9, to which passage the couching particularly refers (comp. Numb. xxiii. 24, xxiv. 9, Isa. xxix. 1), because it was a royal people, of equal birth with other independent and powerful nations, as this royal nature was historically displayed, especially in the times of David and Solomon. The highest development of this lion nature, the true verification of Gen. xlix. 9, 10, came to pass in the future, in the appearance of the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. v. 5). Before, however, this highest development could take place, the people must sink so deep as to resemble a worm rather than a lion. For in the kingdom of God the way is *per ardua ad astra:* there is no state of exaltation without the corresponding state of humiliation. The whelps of the mother are the sons of the king of Israel. The bringing up of these among lions points to the fact that the kingdom of Israel was of equal birth with the mighty kings of the heathen world. In verse 3 the figure of a lion is otherwise applied. The ignoble side of the lion-nature is here brought to view. The distance, however, is not very great: there is a close connection between the two sides. By the constitution of human nature, arrogance is inseparably connected with high rank, and therewith a rude barbarity to all who stand in the way of self-will. He only who walks with God can escape this natural consequence; and the walk of faith is not the attainment of every man. It should, however, be the attainment of every man among the people of God, and where it fails, and the corrupt nature unfolds itself without resistance, there the vengeance of God takes effect. Jehoahaz proved to be a barbarous tyrant towards his own subjects; whereas, according to its constitution, the kingdom of Israel should exhibit a heroic power against the enemies of the people of God. For this reason he was punished. To the mother here corresponds,

in 2 Kings xxiii. 30, the people of the land, who, after Josiah fell in the battle with the Egyptians, made Jehoahaz king. In verse 5 the second type of the fate awaiting Zedekiah is still more definite than the first, because Zedekiah, like Jehoiachin, was also to be carried away to Babylon. The co-operation of the people in the elevation of Jehoiachin is not mentioned in the narrative, as in the case of Jehoahaz. But respect to the wishes of the people is implied in his being the son of Jehoiakim. Jehoiachin also (verse 6) exposed the bad side of the lion-nature. The *knowing* in verse 7 denotes the practising of brutalities. While the first part of the elegy applies to the kingdom, the second describes the existing condition of the people. They are addressed in verse 10. Verse 11 refers especially to the glorious condition of the people under David and Solomon. The east wind and the fire (verses 12, 14) are figures of the Divine judgment to be executed by the Chaldeans. The wilderness (verse 13) denotes the misery of the state of exile, in which the passing of Israel through the wilderness in the olden time repeated itself. The fire, in verse 14, goes out from the chief stem of the branches—it does not take its rise from the Chaldees, but proceeds from the royal family itself, which by its crimes called down the divine vengeance. The fruit denotes the prosperity of the people. The prophet here dwells on what Israel receives in the way of her works. She falls into utter destruction, until, with the appearance of the Messiah, through God's unmerited grace, a new beginning is made and the word is heard, "I am the true vine."—*Hengstenberg.*

SELECTED—II.

God's judgment in breaking the strong rods of a community (verse 12).

The Jewish community is the vine mentioned here, the strong rods are her wise and able rulers; their being withered, means that they have been removed by death, and the breaking and withering of these strong rods is here spoken of as an awful calamity.

I.—Observe what qualifications of those who are in public authority may properly give them the denomination of strong rods.

1. *Great ability for the management of public affairs.* This is the case when they are men of uncommon strength of reason and largeness of understanding, especially when they have a natural genius for government.

2. When they have likewise *largeness of heart and a greatness and nobleness of disposition.* It is peculiarly unbecoming them to be capable of little tricks and intrigues.

3. Those in authority should be endowed with *much of the spirit of government.* They must have a peculiar aptitude for using their knowledge, and a spirit of resolution and activity.

4. *Stability is another essential.* A strong rod must be firm and immoveable in the execution of justice and judgment.

5. It contributes to the strength of a rod when he is in such *circumstances* as give him advantage for the exercise of his strength.

II.—When such strong rods are broken and withered by death, it is a judgment of God upon the people who are deprived of them.

1. *By reason of the many positive benefits and blessings to a people that such men are the instruments of.* Rulers are to the body politic as the vitals of the body natural, as the foundations of a building (Psa. lxxxii. 5, xi. 3). Their influence has a tendency to promote wealth and virtue, to make each one the instrument of the other's prosperity, and so to advance their reputation and honour in the world. Therefore, the wise man says, "Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles" (Eccles. x. 17). Solomon was himself a remarkable illustration of this truth. (See 1 Kings iv. 25, x. 27.) The flourishing state of the kingdom of Judah, while strong rods bare rule, is noticed in our context (verse 11).

2. *On account of the great calamities they are a defence from.* Government is necessary to defend communities from miseries from within themselves; they are the heads of union without

which nothing is to be expected but remediless and endless broils. We see the need of government in societies, by what is visible in families—those lesser societies of which all public societies are constituted,—and as government is absolutely necessary, so there is a necessity of strong rods in order to it: the business being such as requires persons so qualified.

2. They are no less necessary *to defend the community from foreign enemies.* As they are like the pillars of a building, so they are like the bulwarks of a city; they are under God a people's main strength in time of war. This is expressed in a lively manner by the Jewish community in her lamentations. "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under His shadow we shall live among the heathen" (Lam. iv. 20; see also Neh. ix. 27). On these accounts, when a nation is strong, rods are broken; it is a judgment worthy of such lamentation as that which followed the death of king Josiah, who is one of those doubtless referred to in the text (2 Chron. xxxv. 24, 25).—*Jonathan Edwards.*

AHOLAH AND AHOLIBAH.

"*The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother,*" etc. —Ezek. xxiii.

NOTE.—The force of the distinctive use of the two names, Aholah and Aholibah, lies in the circumstance, that the former, signifying *her* or *her own tent*, intimates that the worship celebrated at Samaria was self-invented; it had never received the sanction of Jehovah, but on the contrary, had always been marked as an object of his abhorrence; whereas the latter, signifying *my tent is in her*, is expressive of the

appropriation of Jerusalem and the temple-worship by Jehovah, as having his Divine and gracious warrant.—*Henderson.*

In this chapter the sin of Israel and Judah in seeking foreign alliances is set forth under the same metaphor as in chap. xvi., with this slight difference, that the two kingdoms are here brought to the bar of Divine Justice for the sin of seeking the friendship of idolatrous nations rather than for the sin of practising idolatry. The nature of the allegory forbids consideration of minute details, but we may remark—

I.—The manifest wisdom of God in forbidding intercourse between His people and the nations.

We understand why wise parents forbid their children to form friendship with ungodly families around them. While the habits are unformed, and when principles have not acquired sufficient strength to stand the test of temptation, such intercourse could not fail to do great injury to the character. This was the motive which prompted Jehovah to place so many barriers around His people in order to preserve them from the pollution which He saw would be the consequence of intercourse with the heathen. Hence also the heavy penalties attached to the adoption of idolatrous practices. (See Deut. xxviii. xxix).

II.—That Samaria is charged in the parable with being first in the transgression (verses 5 to 10).

Her distance from Jerusalem, the seat of the true worship, and her nearness to Syria, with which country the Assyrians held much intercourse, may have contributed to her early apostasy, which began with the introduction of the calf-worship under Jeroboam. (Comp. verse 8 with 1 Kings xii. 28). But it must be remembered that, to counterbalance these disadvantages, God gave to the kingdom of Israel two of the greatest prophets of the old dispensation, Elijah and Elisha.

III.—That though Judah's apostasy was last in time it was first in magnitude.

"And when her sister Aholibah saw *this*," *i.e.*, the judgment which had fallen upon Assyria, "she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she" (ver. 11). Judah saw the consequences of alliance with idolators in the captivity of the sister kingdom; she had before her eyes a proof of God's faithful fulfilment of His threatenings, and yet she persisted in her evil course and even went beyond Israel in this sin. Then the position of the kingdom of Judah was more favourable to separation from the surrounding nations, and she had the temple service, in more or less of its purity, celebrated in her midst when kings like Josiah and Hezekiah sat upon her throne. From the subject we may learn—

I.—That sin is self-polluting and therefore self-destroying. The garment trailed constantly in the mire will be polluted, and if left uncleansed will in time be destroyed, and will fail to serve the end for which it was woven. So the soul, continually dragged through the mire of sin, will, unless a cleansing process be applied, be destroyed in so far that it will fall utterly short of the end for which it was created. Constant contact with sin will pollute the *conscience*, and render it powerless to fulfil the end for which it has been implanted in the man. It will destroy the *understanding* in the sense that it renders it unable to see and know the things of God. Filth thrown upon the bodily eyes and allowed to remain there, would destroy the sight, and sin is a filthy bandage on the eyes of the understanding. "Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the *understanding darkened* . . . . who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephes. iv. 18, 19). Sin persisted in, defiles the *will*, and makes it like a palsied limb which has no power to perform its functions. It pollutes the *affections* by bringing them in contact with debasing objects until their power to love goodness is gone. And so the man having destroyed all the forces of his being, stands before the universe with nothing left but his *identity*, which he cannot destroy. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed

thyself" (Hosea. xiii. 9). "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul" (Prov. viii. 36). "Men need no more to sink them than the weight of their own sins."—*Matt. Henry.*

II.—That those who depart from God shall be punished by the world for changing their master.

"Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I will raise up thy lovers against thee" (verse 22). The deserter who comes over from the enemy's camp is often regarded with suspicion, and sometimes meets with contempt where he expected to find reward. His zeal in the service of his new master is looked upon as simply an effort to ingratiate himself for his own ends, and he very often finds punishment instead of welcome. So the world to which the apostate from God returns becomes the instrument of his punishment. He must become a greater sinner than those to whom he joins himself, in order to convince his new master that he is entirely with him. Seven devils must take the place of one, and the last state of that man must become worse than the first; and even that will not save him from the fates of Israel and Judah. "Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted (verse 9). There is no sinner in the world so great as he who once professed to be "not of the world." If the *salt* has lost its savour, it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men" (Matt. v. 13). Israel and Judah, by going over to the heathen, are charged with having "laid their body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over," and the nations to whom they thus degraded themselves said in return, "Bow down, that we may go over" (Isa. li. 23). The world will wipe their feet upon an apostate; such a man must become "a door-mat to the devil."

III.—That when sinners can serve no other purpose in the world, they may render a service by being a warning to others.

We have shadows here of the truth that hell has its use in the universe, and that men beyond reach of recovery may be

of this use. Convicts have their sphere of usefulness, though it is of such a nature as to send a shudder through the mind of other men. The chained eagle is a warning to those whose wings are free. The buried "cities of the plain" still speak to the nations and the world. Samaria and Jerusalem have been preachers of righteousness in this sense for ages.

SELECTED—I.

I.—For God's people to confederate with Babylonians is to defile their covenant relation to God.

God is a jealous God; His worship must be pure, the heart must be pure; if the worship be mixed, or the heart lean upon an arm of flesh, the bed of love is defiled.

II.—Wickedness is violent and inconstant. Aholibah doted on the Assyrians (verse 12); and again she doted on the Chaldeans (verse 16), and in verse 17 her mind is alienated from them. This made the Lord to say, "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?" (Jer. ii. 36).

III.—Open sinning causes God to renounce them that do so.

What more dreadful sound was ever heard in the ears of any people than, "Lo-ammi; ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (Hosea i. 9). If we would not have God so alienated from us, and so be disowned—renounced by Him—let us take heed of all sins, especially of impudency in any sin; let us not alienate our hearts from Him, and so He will not alienate His heart from us.

IV.—God's judgments are teaching things.

He brought judgment on Aholah and her sister that all women might be taught thereby (verse 48), and that they themselves might know that He was the "the Lord" (verse 49). There is no judgment but speaks (1) to those who are guilty of the same sins to admire the long-suffering of God towards them

and to presently turn to the Lord by repentance. (2) To others, to fear such practices as being destructive judgments.

SELECTED—II.

A twofold wickedness is held forth to us in verses 37 to 39.

I.—The wickedness of these nations considered in themselves.

II—An additional wickedness resulting from their joining of these actions with sacred things.

Doctrine.—When they that attend ordinances of Divine worship allow themselves in known wickedness, they are guilty of dreadfully profaning and polluting those ordinances.

I.—The ordinances of God are holy in the following respects. 1. They are conversant wholly and immediately about God and things Divine. 2. Their immediate end is to glorify God. 3. They have the sanction of Divine authority. 4. They are attended in the name of God.

II.—These ordinances are profaned by those who attend on them, and yet allow themselves in the ways of wickedness.

1. Because, by so doing, they show great contempt of those holy ordinances. 2. By making a show of respect to them, and then acting contrary in their lives, they do but mock God. 3. They put the ordinances of God to a profane use. 4. Their conduct tends to beget contempt of them in others.—*Jonathan Edwards.*

THE BOILING CAULDRON AND THE DEATH OF THE PROPHET'S WIFE.

"*Utter a parable to the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour water into it; gather the pieces thereof into it, even every good piece, thigh and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. Take the choice of the flock, and burn also the bones under it, and make it boil well, and let them seethe the bones of it therein. . . Heap on wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and spice it well, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, that the scum of it may be consumed,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xxiv. 3-27.

The first parable foretells how the boastful language of Israel in the past was about to become true in the history of the future, in a very different sense from that which they intended. A well-fortified city may well be compared to an iron cauldron, and the inhabitants may seem as secure from attack from without as the flesh within the vessel is safe from the fire outside. This had been the confident feeling of the people of Jerusalem. They had said, notwithstanding all the prophecies that had been uttered against them, "It is not near, let us build houses; this city is the cauldron, and we be the flesh" (Ezek. xi. 3). Now, God takes up the same similitude, and tells them in detail how their words should be fulfilled.

1. That which they had regarded as their strength should be their destruction. As, when flesh is put into a pot, the sides which protect it from the fire render it impossible that any piece should escape boiling, so the natural and artificial defences of Jerusalem should make it more easy for the Chaldean army so to encompass the city that all its inhabitants should fall into the hands of their enemies. "Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not

gone out of it! bring it out piece by piece; let no lot fall upon it" (ver. 6).

2. That all classes of the community should share the same fate. In every siege the poor are the first to suffer; they have less means of sustaining life, and therefore succumb first in a dearth. The rich often manage to outlive the siege, or, if the city is taken, to make terms with the conquerors. But here all were to suffer alike. The flesh of a carcase would be the only part that could be consumed by boiling, but the prophet is here commanded not only to "gather the pieces thereof into it," but to "burn the bones under it;" thereby to ensure the destruction of the whole. The bones would be the first to be destroyed, as the poor would be the first to lose their lives; but this does not imply that the nobles and princes would not suffer as much or more, although, like the flesh, they would be longer in undergoing the destroying process. The bitterness of death is often past when the mailed hand of the conqueror is on the throat of a king. Zedekiah, when blind in Babylon, might well have envied those who perished in Jerusalem at the beginning of the siege.

3. That the besiegers should delight in the sufferings of their victims, Ezekiel is commanded to "spice it well" as one who is preparing a savoury meal. The Chaldeans would take as much pleasure in their work as men do in sitting down to a feast.

4. That not only should Jerusalem be emptied of its inhabitants, but the city itself should be destroyed. The vessel, when its contents had been consumed, was to be "set empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn" (ver. 11). This part of the similitude foretells the day when Nebuzaradan "burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire. And all the army of the

Chaldees, that were with the army of the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about" (2 Kings xxv. 9, 10). In a time of pestilence, when disease has smitten a family, not only are their bodies consigned quickly to the grave, but their very raiment is committed to the flames to prevent the spread of infection. So God would have the city which had been so defiled with idol-worship razed to the ground, and, above all, the temple burned with fire. This crowning calamity is shadowed forth in the death of Ezekiel's wife. She was dear to him—the "desire of his eyes," even as their "holy, their beautiful house, where their fathers had praised Jehovah" (Isa. lxiv. 11), was dear to every pious Jew. She was connected with him in a relationship ordained by God, even as the Temple and its service were the gifts of God to His people and were signs of their covenant relation to Him. But a visitation of God would take away both: "I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth. . . . Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign" (verses 21–24).

Lessons.

I.—Those who profess a true religion and possess a bad character, defile their creed by their character. The youth who belongs to an honourable family and lives a vicious life brings the very name of his family into ill-repute. The man who calls himself a Christian, and lives an un-Christ-like life, defiles the name he bears. The Temple of God in Jerusalem was God's home upon the earth, and the Hebrews boasted in their possession of it (Jer. vii. 4). But while boasting of their relationship to it they lived like the synagogue of Satan, and made the name of Jehovah "to be polluted among the heathen" (ch.xx. 9).

II.—The possession of a correct creed will not preserve a a nation or an individual from moral degeneration unless it has its out-come in a life in accordance with it. The child

who has a Bible given to it by his father, may treasure the book carefully and boast of his possession. But the mere holding of the book will not save him from going down in the scale of morality. To do this he must translate the law of God into life and thus create a new thing in the earth—a holy character which is all his own, and which he could not inherit from his parent. The Hebrew nation had the oracles of God, but the mere preservation of them in the Temple were powerless to prevent their ruin. If they had used them to form themselves into the "holy nation" which they were intended to be (Exod. xix. 5), they would have possessed that which would have insured them against moral decay.

III.—There are higher claims than those springing from human relationships. This seems a hard saying, but it is one that is admitted by noble men to be true. The man who descends into the depths of a coal-mine to rescue another who is perishing, while his wife stands at the pit's mouth, beseeching him not to venture his life, recognises this law. So does the citizen-soldier who leaves his home and family to fight for the oppressed, and the doctor who from choice follows the army on campaign to relieve the sufferings of the wounded. Christ proclaimed this truth when He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. x. 37). "At even my wife died: and I did in the morning as I was commanded" (verse 18), *i.e.*, he subordinated his private sorrow to the interests of God's truth.

SELECTED—I.

If the first symbolic action belongs to the department of the inner, the same holds good obviously of the second. A wife of Ezekiel has no more actually died than he is actually set on a cauldron. The thought, in verses 16 and 17, is, not that the existing public misfortune is so great, that the pain of the individual at the heaviest personal loss is thereby overpowered; but the prophet merely prefigures a future state of the people.

He is the type of the nation, and the wife the counterpart of all that was dear and precious to the people—namely, the Temple, in which all else was included. They shall not weep for the downfall of it, because they shall be wholly taken up with the pain of their own misery.—*Hengstenberg.*

SELECTED—II.

I.—Cities have their filth and scum in them.

The poor are not the "scum" of a city, but the sin of poor and rich. To great cities there is a confluence of all sorts of people who bring scum and filth with them and add to what they find there.

II.—Heavy judgments upon sinful places do not work out the wickedness which is in them. Jerusalem suffered hard things, yet her "scum" went not out of her, it boiled in (Jer. v. 3). Is the scum gone out of London by all the sad strokes we have had?

III.—When judgments prevail not with sinful places to cleanse them from their iniquities, God will certainly destroy such places, and the punishment shall be open. The besieging and burning of Jerusalem was so famous, that all the nations took notice thereof, and made themselves sport therewith (Lam. ii. 15, 16). She would not cover her sin and shame, and God would not cover her punishment (vers. 7, 8).—*Greenhill.*

THE LAMENTATION UPON THE KING OF TYRE.

"*Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God: Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xxviii. 11-19.

Notice,—

I.—That the occasion of this lamentation was a wrong estimate springing from a profound ignorance.

The prince of Tyrus had said, by action if not in word, "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas" (ver. 2). The man who estimates himself as equal to one who is immeasurably his superior, gives the greatest possible proof of his own ignorance. A man who rules a small school may argue, from the fact that all under him obey him, that he is fit to rule a kingdom. This estimate is, probably, the most weighty proof of his unfitness, because it betrays his extreme self-ignorance. The king of Tyre ruled over a small isle of the sea, which was in God's sight "a very little thing" (Isa. xl. 15). On this small spot of earth he swayed his sceptre over merchant-princes, who, like the ants, spent their days in gathering and hoarding. This ant-hill had grown rapidly in influence on account of the riches that had been gathered into the busy nest. The island was considered secure from all invasion, separated as it was from the mainland, and possessing a fleet equal, and perhaps superior, to any other kingdom of the world at that time. Hence the inhabitants—represented in the parable by their king—said, in the insolence of fancied security and the pride of wealth, "I am a God." But this estimate arose from their profound ignorance of Him to whom "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and as the small dust of the balance," who "bringeth the princes of the earth to nothing, and maketh the judges of the earth as vanity" (Isa. xl. 15, 23).

II.—The excess of her prosperity was the completion of her ruin.

Vessels are sometimes so heavily laden that they need nothing to sink them but a heavy sea. If they had carried less, they might have survived to carry more. Animals are sometimes so over-fed that they are in danger of death from being over-fattened. The wick of a candle is sometimes so saturated with grease that the flame is extinguished by that which was intended to feed it. So the greatness of Tyre's

prosperity was the cause of her pride, and hence the foundation of her fall.

III.—That which was Tyre's special glory has for ages added to her desolation.

She boasted that she sat "in the midst of the seas." The sea was to Tyre, as to Great Britain, her wall of defence and her source of wealth. Now, the waves, washing the shore of an insignificant fishing village, only add to the desolation. (It is, of course, well known that Tyre has been united to the mainland since its famous siege by Alexander, who constructed the enormous artificial mole which enabled him at last to succeed in his undertaking). The remains of her former magnificence lie for ever buried in the deep.

LESSONS.

I.—Wealth is likely to lead men to form wrong estimates as to the value of things. They are very prone to over-rate the value of money, and to undervalue character. Christ spoke a parable about two rich men, one who was rich in goodness, and the other who was rich in money. The man who had the last despised him who possessed the first; but this conduct arose from ignorance. Two small gold pieces placed upon a man's eyes will entirely prevent his looking a better man in the face. Nothing less than a revelation of heaven and hell could have brought the man who was rich only for this world to believe that he had been insolent to his betters in the person of Lazarus. "Let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, saith the Lord" (Jer. ix. 23).

II.—It is much safer to have God for our confidence than any of His most obedient servants. The man who has the goodwill of a monarch will be sure that the king's servants will be at his call, but if he has only the servants to trust in, he may find that they will prefer obeying their master, and will

leave him to his fate. It is the great boast of some Englishmen that we, having the sea for our friend, may defy the world. But the sea is a very obedient servant of the Most High God, and it would be better for us, as a nation, to make sure of being on good terms with the Master, who will not permit the honour due to Him to be given to His creatures. That they were in the midst of the sea was the great boast of the ancient Tyrians, and the present condition of that old mistress of the seas may preach a good sermon to this modern Tyre. "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it?" (Jer. v. 22).

SELECTED—I.

It is clear from the very commencement of this singular passage from the mention here made of the Garden of Eden, that the representation contained in it is of an ideal character; that it is, in short, a historical parable. The kings of Tyre are first personified as one individual—an ideal man, and one complete in all natural excellence, perfect manhood. Not unnaturally so, since Tyre having sprung from a barren rock, and grown till she had become the mistress of the world's commerce, was a kind of new creation in the earth—as a state, the most singular product in existence of human energy and enterprising skill. Therefore, this ideal man, the representative of whatever there was of greatness and glory in Tyre, and in whom, consequently, the Tyrian spirit of self-elation and pride appears in full efflorescence, is ironically viewed by the prophet as the type of humanity in its highest states of existence upon earth. All that is best and noblest in the history of the past, he sees in imagination meeting in this so-called *beau-ideal* of humanity. It was he who in primeval time trod the hallowed walks of Paradise, and used at will its manifold treasures, and regaled himself with its corporeal delights. It was he who afterwards assumed the form of a cherub—ideal compound of the highest states of animal existence—type of humanity in its

predestined state of ultimate completeness and glory; and, as such, had a place assigned him among the consecrated symbols of God's sanctuary in the Holy Mount, where, in the immediate presence of the Most High, he overshadowed the mercy-seat. Thus, occupying the highest spheres of created life, and familiar even with the sight of the Divine glory, he knew what it was to dwell amidst the consuming fire, and to walk as on burning stones of sapphire. Whatever humanity has had, or has been typified to have of dignity and honour in the past history of God's administration, it has been thine to possess. So thou thinkest, thou ideal man, thou concentration of human excellence, thou quintessence of human greatness and pride. Thou thinkest that manhood's divinest qualities, and most honourable conditions of being, belong peculiarly to thyself, since thou dost nobly peer above all and standeth alone in thy glory. Let it be so. But thou art still a man, and like humanity itself, in its most favoured conditions, thou hast not been perfect before God; thou hast yielded thyself a servant to corruption. With creaturely waywardness and inconstancy, thou hast gone astray on thy high places, and hast abused the ample gifts and resources which should have been all employed in subservience to the will and glory of God. Therefore thou must be cast down from thy proud elevation; thou must lose they cherubic nearness to God; the sacred and blissful haunts which thou hast defiled with thy abominations shall no longer know thee, and thou shalt henceforth be a monument to all of forfeited honour, abused privileges, and hopeless ruin. Such we take to be the style and import of this remarkable vision. A sublime moral runs through the parable. It reads over again the great lesson of man's weakness and degeneracy, and shows inevitably the good, when unaccompanied by a Divine element, turns in him to corruption and ruin. In the royal head of the state of Tyre a new trial was made of humanity with the greatest earthly advantages, he being endowed with the amplest resources of wealth and art, and placed on the loftiest pinnacle oi the world's wisdom and prosperity, but all in vain.—*Fairbairn.*

THE CEDAR IN LEBANON.

"*Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xxxi. 3-18.

This parable embraces—1. History. 2. Symbol. 3. Argument.

I. History.

The 29th and 30th chapters of Ezekiel contain prophecies concerning the downfall of the kingdom of Egypt. It seemed difficult to believe that a kingdom which had been powerful through so many ages should be about to fall from its proud ascendancy; and to enforce the truth of the fact, the prophet goes back a little in the history of the past, and reminds his hearers how a kingdom, apparently more powerful than Egypt, had been swept out of the world. Assyria had been utterly overthrown by the Babylonians and Medes. Sennacherib had boasted that no "god of any kingdom" had been able to deliver his people out of the hand of the Assyrian (2 Chron. xxxii. 14), but in less than a hundred years after, his descendant, Sardanapalus or Saracus, had been driven to destroy himself, his wives, and his treasures in one vast funeral pile, kindled by his own hand, and the proud city of Nineveh had been destroyed (see "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible"). The recapitulation of this event in the address to Pharaoh shows—

1. That it is taken for granted that the kings of the present are acquainted with the history of the kingdoms of the past. Those who stand in any special relation to society in the present ought to study the histories of those who have sustained the same relation in the past. Scientific men to-day are supposed to know what has been the experience of those who trod the path of investigation into Nature's secrets before them. Medical men who would be successful in their profession must go back to the experience of those who have preceded them in the art of healing. Christians are strengthened

by the history of Christian life in the past, and the diligent study of the history of the kingdoms of the past is an essential for the ruler of a kingdom in the present. Those who sit on thrones in palaces of stone, or on thrones in human hearts, will commit a fatal mistake if they do not acquaint themselves with the experience of those who have left the world, and were once in like positions. The king of Egypt is here addressed as one who knew the history of the king of Assyria. 2. That the *destruction* of the kingdoms of the past is the material out of which is woven *instruction* for the kingdoms of the present. The fragments of vessels upon the coast where a fleet has gone to pieces and left her sad history upon the sand, ought to instruct the captain who passes by that way. And so the fragmentary records of the fates of ancient nations which are cast upon the sands of time ought to afford instruction to those who pilot the ship of state to-day. The downfall of the mighty monarchy on the banks of the Tigris said to ancient, and says to modern, nations, "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He hath wrought in the earth." "Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth" (Psa. ii. 10; xlvi. 8). Out of the eater is to come forth meat. "Go," said God to Israel, "unto my place which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people" (Jer. vii. 12). 3. That this instruction out of the sad past is given to prevent history from thus repeating itself. We have no pleasure in administering punishment to our children, nor as a social community do we like to think of our gaols and our gallows. But we hope that the experience of the past will prevent repetition of sin in the future.

II. Symbol.

One of the grandest products of the vegetable world—a cedar of Lebanon—is used as a symbol of the greatness of the Assyrian king. "No tree," says Henderson, "is more remarkable for the magnificence of its appearance, and no object could have been more appropriately selected to set forth the

surpassing glory of the king of Assyria. It is generally from 50 to 80 feet high, and the diameter of the space covered by its branches is much greater than its height. No tree equals it in tallness, symmetry, and bulk. Such had been the mighty Assyrian monarch, that none of the great ones of the earth could for a moment compare with him." The extent of his dominion is set forth in the length of its boughs affording shelter for "for all the fowl of heaven." The waters that fed its roots represent "the waters of the Tigris with its branches and canals, which irrigated the Assyrian empire" (Henderson). The symbol is carried to the utmost extent when all the trees of Eden are represented as envying this goodly cedar. But by-and-bye it is hewn down by a mighty hand, its boughs are broken, its leaf withers, and its bare and lifeless trunk lies upon the earth forsaken of all the birds who so lately made their home there;—a graphic description of the overthrow of Assyria in the person of Sardanapalus, the crash of whose empire might be supposed to affect all the surrounding nations, as the fall of a giant tree would shake, and even bring down with it, the neighbouring trees of the forest. The symbol suggests, 1. The adaptation of nature to set forth truth in relation to men. The entire globe is not of equal worth to one human soul, yet one object in it can symbolise a kingdom and its head, so big is it with typical suggestion. The various objects of the vegetable kingdom seem to be especially adapted to illustrate Divine truth, judging from their constant use for this purpose by the Greatest Teacher. 2. It recognises the existence of orders and degrees among men. As there is a mighty difference between the cedar and the vine, so there is an equal difference between the gifts and callings of men. Yet, as in nature, so in providence, each has its peculiar use, each is designed to supply some particular need, and has some excellence and advantage not possessed by the others. 3. That all creatures, whether with or without intelligence, are alike dependent upon the same God. The greatest ruler holds his dominion from the same hand that gives life to

the trees of the wood, the Being who has lightnings to shiver, and winds to uproot the cedars of Lebanon, has forces at His call to overturn all the rulers of the world. "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isa. xlv. 5). "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1. See also Jer. xviii. 7-10).

III.—Argument.

That if the great king of Assyria had fallen from his high position, the king of Egypt had nothing to insure him from a similar fall. If a mightier power had been overthrown, had not a power less mighty reason to fear? The same destructive force was at work in the heart of Pharaoh as in the Assyrian. Pride wrought the ruin of the one and it was to be the downfall of the other. "Because thou hast lifted thyself up in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen . . . . To whom art thou thus like in glory, and in greatness among the trees of Eden? yet thou shalt be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with them that be slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord" (verses 10-18). The tree that has a worm preying upon its roots contains within itself the cause of its ultimate destruction. The outside of the trunk may look perfect, but if the heart has been eaten away, it will fall in some storm, even though it be a cedar of Lebanon. And the worm that has been the destruction of one mighty tree will be equally fatal to another.

LESSONS.

I.—The soul that will not *grow* down must be *cut* down. Trees that are to stand the storm must send their roots deep into the earth. A man that is to face successfully the storms of life

must have a downward growth of humility and faith. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

II.—The true teacher of man is greater than a monarch whose position *only* gives him power. Pharaoh must go to school to Ezekiel. A *man* is more than a *king*.

SELECTED—I.

This parabolical representation, it will be observed, is marked by the same peculiarity which we had occasion to notice in the ideal delineation of the King of Tyre; it combines the historical with the figurative. While the cedar that represents the King of Assyria, is called a cedar in Lebanon—Lebanon being by way of eminence, the region of cedars—it is presently transferred in the prophet's imagination to the land of primeval beauty and perfection, the Eden in which was the garden that God had planted. There this cedar is described as flourishing and growing till its overtopt in magnificence and beauty all the trees of the field around it; because fed in a manner quite peculiar to the waters of that deep flood, which, rising somewhere in Eden, divided itself into four branches, and watered the whole garden. Thus happily circumstanced, the exuberance and glory of paradise appeared to revive in this singular tree, and none even there could be compared with it. But it was only that it might afford another specimen of that instability and transitoriness which belongs to all on earth, when the good bestowed by Heaven is abused to purposes of selfishness, and the creature begins to thrust himself into the place of his Creator. Thus the incomparable cedar, forgetting, as it were, its own place, is given to destruction, and its place is no more found. How thoroughly the loftiness of spirit in the head of the Assyrian monarchy kept pace with the growth and magnitude of his dominions, may be seen from the heaven-daring language of Sennacherib to Hezekiah. . . . . When God's purpose is formed, the proper instrument is sure to be forthcoming at the appointed time; and in an amazingly

brief period, the mighty fabric of Assyrian glory fell an irrecoverable ruin. It was a lesson, on a gigantic scale, to the world that then was, how God in His providence abases the proud, and scatters the mighty from their seats; how all power and glory that is of the world is destined to vanish away as a dream of the night! . . . In the government of an unchangeable God, that which has been is the sure index to what in like circumstances shall again be.—*Fairbairn.*

SELECTED—II.

A future in a historical dress—this is the pervading character of this chapter. The imposing grandeur that still remained to Egypt exercised on the minds that sought a support on earth, a safe embankment against the overflow of the Asiatic empire, a magic influence. This influence vanished when Egypt was chained to the already overwhelmed Assyria. . . . The prophet shows, from the example of Assyria, that no greatness on earth can withstand the strokes of God. The cedar, the "queen of trees," is a figurative designation of that which was prominent above all others in the human world. Water and flood denote that which the world calls good fortune—the Divine blessing that accompanied the undertakings of Assyria, the flow of favour that gave her prosperity. The trees of the field, to which the flood nourishing Assyria sends its channels, denote his subjects in contrast with the king of Assyria, the cedar in Lebanon. The grandees of the earth appear in verse 8 as stately trees, according to an oft-recurring figure; as, for example, in Isaiah x. 18, 19, the trees of Assyria, in contrast with his underwood (verse 17), are his grandees. The chief seat of this figurative representation in the Old Testament is in Daniel and Ezekiel, in the New Testament in Revelation (chap. vii. 1). The total of the great men of the earth Ezekiel denotes as the garden of God, in which he regards them as the counterpart of the garden which God once planted in Eden—of Paradise with its glorious trees. The comparison is the more suitable, because, as Paradise was

planted by God, so all human greatness has its origin in God. . . . But greatness itself becomes a sin and a cause of the Divine judgment if it is not, as it were, expiated and sanctified by humble submission to God. . . . Where pride has first occupied the heart, there all Divine and human rights are trampled under foot. The tender respect for them roots in the consciousness of being under God. "I drove him out:" this points to the driving of the first man out of Paradise, that was also a consequence of pride, with reference to verse 8 and 9, according to which the king of Assyria was also in a garden of God. The ruin in verse 13 (verse 16 shows that it must be so translated) stands for the fallen tree, that is, as it were, a living ruin. The fowls of heaven and the wild beasts, that formerly sought protection under this tree, assemble now for another object beside the fallen—to peck, and gnaw, and take what they please of its fruits. In great catastrophes every one seeks to draw advantage from the misfortune. . . . In verse 15, Lebanon, denoting the kingdom of the heathen (comp. verse 3, and xvii. 3), mourns over the fall of Assyria's greatness, which forebodes evil to all the other world-powers. The trees of Eden, in verse 16, are the former high ones of the earth, who resembled the trees of Paradise in glory, and in whom these were represented, as it were, anew. In the fall of Assyria they went through their own sorrow a second time. We have here a variation of Isa. xiv. 9, 10, where the king of Babylon is received in the kingdom of the dead by those who had gone before him.—*Hengstenberg.*

THE UNFAITHFUL SHEPHERDS.

"Thus saith the Lord God unto the Shepherds: Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" etc.—Ezek. xxxiv.

This parable teaches—

I. That human rulers stand in the same relation to the people whom they rule as shepherds to their flocks.

Therefore the qualifications required are similar. They need—

1. *A special knowledge.* The first man who can be met upon the highway will not do to be entrusted with the care of sheep. A man must be possessed of certain knowledge before he can be a successful shepherd. It is a *profession* for which *training* is necessary. "Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth" (Gen. xlvi. 34). So to rule men successfully requires a knowledge of men. The most able rulers have been those who were best acquainted with human nature. Such knowledge is the result of much consideration and experience. Christ is the pre-eminent Ruler of Men because He *knows* them—because He needs not that any should "testify of any man" whom He is shepherding for eternity (John ii. 25). From His absolute knowledge of all the dwellers upon earth springs His ability to be the "Shepherd and Bishop of souls" (1 Peter ii. 25). Christ knows the very essence of the immortal spirit, how it acts upon, and is reacted upon by, the flesh, *what* and *where* it has been, what it is capable of becoming, and what means will be best adapted to train it for eternity. Because He *knows* more about men than any other ruler, therefore He *is* more than any other ruler of men. "I know my sheep" (John x. 14).

2. *A willingness to endure hardship* for those whom they shepherd. The life of a shepherd is well pictured in the well-known words of Jacob, "Thus I was; in the day the drought

consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Gen. xxxi. 40). Shepherds of men must likewise be willing to deny themselves for their flock even as Christ was willing to spend his nights upon the mountains (Luke vi. 12) and to be consumed with labour during the day, in order to be "the *Good* Shepherd." But for this another qualification is essential, viz.,

3. *Affection for the flock.* We are none of us strangers to the feeling of regard which often springs up in men towards animals which are dependent on them, and therefore we can imagine that every shepherd who is faithful to his trust must feel an affection for his sheep. This makes it more easy to suffer for them, and to face dangers for them, as David did when he slew "the lion and the bear and delivered the lamb out of his mouth" (1 Sam. xvii. 34). It cannot be dispensed with in ruling men. To love men is to understand them. To love them is to be willing to suffer for them, and must beget a correspondent feeling in any men worthy of the name. The Great Shepherd had as much love for His flock as He had knowledge of them. Therefore he gave "His life for the sheep" (John x. 11).

II.—That the rulers of Israel had lacked these qualifications.

This is shown in their negative and positive transgressions —in what they had left undone as well as in what they had done.

1. *Negative.* Their self-indulgence had led them to neglect to feed the flock. "Woe to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves." Consequently, they had taken no account of the diseased or straying members of their flock. "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost." If the leaders of Israel had set themselves to reclaiming the

people from idolatry, they would probably have prevented the Captivity.

2. But they had gone from neglect to *positive acts* of crime. They had taken the lives of their subjects in order to enjoy their possessions. "Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye *kill* them that are fed. . . . . With force and with *cruelty* have ye ruled them." Such transactions as that between Naboth and Ahab had doubtless been repeated in a thousand forms. Sins of *omission* lead to sins of *commission.*

III.—The effect of the negative and positive transgressions of Israel's rulers.

"My sheep were scattered." The ten tribes were wanderers in the land of Assyria, the men of Judah were dwelling, some in Babylon, some in Egypt, while a few still remained in their desolated land. They were so widely sundered as to be beyond the recall of any but the Omniscient One, who alone knew the mountains upon which they were wandering.

IV.—That God Himself would raise up a Shepherd who would combine all the qualities needed to gather in the scattered flock.

Notice,—

1. The *name* given to this divinely-appointed shepherd—*David.* David was a type of the Messiah and also His ancestor according to the flesh (Rom. i. 1, 3). The Messiah is called by this name in Isa. lv. 3, 4; Jer. xxx. 9; Hosea iii. 5.

2. *His two-fold office.* His Father's servant, and His people's king (ver. 24). He was under His Father's rule, being neither self-elected nor self-directed (Isa. xlii. 1. 7). "As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John xiv. 31). Therefore He reigns in the hearts of men. "I, if I be lifted up, will *draw* all men unto me" (John xii. 32). He would *gather* men. Literally fulfilled when He lived His life upon earth. "They came to Him from every quarter" (Mark i. 45). He is gathering and will gather His spiritual Israel from all nations

(see Gen. xliv. 10; John x. 16). And Israel according to the flesh will be gathered to the standard of Christ (Rom. xi. 15, 34). Sin is a scattering force. Christ is a gathering power because He is incarnate Goodness. Sin scattered men after the Fall and sin scattered the people of Israel in the days of the Captivity, and after their rejection of the Messiah. But God will gather again what sin has scattered and the number of the ingathering will be greater than the number of the scattered. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, *which no man could number*, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev. vii. 9). The end of the Incarnation of the Son of God is that "in the dispensation of the fulness of times God might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Eph. i. 10).

The consideration of this subject suggests that—

V.—That which is intended to be a great blessing to ourselves and others, viz., power, may become the greatest curse to both.

The great mass of mankind are like clay in the hands of human potters, and those who have the destinies of others in their hands and use their power over them for good will bless themselves and others to the end of time. But those who misuse the power thus entrusted to them will be classified with that "son of the morning," whose influence over our first parents "brought death into the world, and all our woe." The "kings" of society, from whatever cause they derive their power, will have to render account to Him to whom "power belongeth" (Psa. lxii. 11). God will demand of them to whom He has entrusted His property, whether they have used it to fashion vessels unto honour and meet for the Master's use. Woe to those who have used their power over the clay to mould vessels of dishonour.

SELECTED—I.

In this chapter the prophet exposes the general profligacy

of the kings and rulers of Judah, especially their daring abuse of the power and influence of their office for their own unholy gratification, whereby they encouraged the ungodly in their iniquity, and brought great calamities on the true flock of God. For even in rebellious and apostate Judah God had still a flock,—a little flock it might be, as the Church has often been, and sore torn and scattered. But it was not to be forgotten or forsaken. God would take upon Himself the office which the rulers of Judah had so grievously perverted—that of the ingathering and guardianship of His flock. How this was to be effected is explained in verses 23, 24, where there is a promise of Christ, under the title of David, the shepherd-king of Israel. Every one acquainted with the Scriptures must see that this name is alike appropriate and significant.

Observe,—

I.—That the promised king is not merely represented as a descendant of David. He is called David, *Jehovah's servant.* The believing, sorrowing captives could not fail to remember how the descendants and successors of David had degenerated, there being none of whom it had been said that they were men after God's own heart, and but few who sought to walk in David's footsteps. But the promised Deliverer is called Jehovah's servant, and therefore he could not be less than David was. The promise implied that He would repair the mischief wrought by the apostate kings who had sat on David's throne.

II.—The typical resemblance which David bore to Christ.

1. The Saviour, like David, was chosen out of the people, and subjected to reproach and persecution at the hand of His enemies, to which David's sufferings were light and trivial.

2. David took Jerusalem and Mount Zion out of the hand of the Jebusites, erected there his own throne, and provided for its becoming the dwelling-place of the Lord of glory.

Christ had to deliver His Church, the true Zion, the spiritual Jerusalem, out of the hand of more formidable foes. And there He sits king, and is present with them by His spirit as really as the cloud of glory was present on Mount Zion of old.

3. It was said of David that the fear of him, and the dread of him was on all the nations round about him. This is fulfilled in a far higher sense in Christ. He has already gathered into His kingdom innumerable multitudes out of many nations, and every new subject is a trophy of His power, for that subject was originally an enemy. The very hostility which the cause of Christ has had to encounter at the hands of kingdoms and individuals is a proof that the fear and dread of Christ is upon them.

III.—That the promise that "they shall dwell safely and none shall make them afraid" is consistent with the sufferings which Christ's flock has undergone in all ages. The promise refers to blessings infinitely beyond any temporal privileges which Christ's people could enjoy, though they were gathered out of all the kingdoms where they are found to be sojourning, and hedged in and protected from all external assault and violence, even to the abiding and comforting sense of His presence and to the communion of the faithful.—*Adapted from R. Gordon's "Christ, as made known to the Ancient Church."*

SELECTED—II.

Verse 11 found its most glorious fulfilment in Christ, but even before His appearance God was active in the restoration from the exile, and the other gracious gifts and benefits, which, however, all point forward to the true fulfilment, and call forth the desire for it. The fat and the strong of verse 16 are the new robber-knights, who will appear among the people when the old are set aside by the Chaldean catastrophe. Even among the people of God such pests spring forth; but they differ in this respect from the heathen, that against these pests which have their root in Gen. iii., an internal reaction always

arises. By the fat and the strong are designated here not all the mighty, but those whose essence is exhausted in possession and might. The address in verse 18 is to the tyrants of the future. Similar relations will return in future, but God will check them powerfully. "I will judge between cattle and cattle:" the work begun in exile will be continued in the course of time, and will find its completion at length in the judgments announced in Matt. xxv. . . . Christ's government and secret, but powerful, sway permit no tyranny nor injustice to endure. A chief phase in the judgment between "cattle and cattle"—rather between "sheep and sheep"—was the decision given by God in the conflict between the synagogue and the rising Christian Church. But that this judgment pervades the whole history, that we have here to do with a true prophecy, and not with a merely patriotic fancy, is shown by a comparison of the present Christian world with the heathen and Mohammedan powers. We invariably see that, since the coming of Christ, a new judicial power is busy among the people of God, which quietly and noiselessly removes the abnormal—a reforming power which the old covenant did not yet possess.—*Hengstenberg.*

THE VISION OF DRY BONES.

"*The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about; and behold there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.*"—Ezek. xxxvii. 1, 14.

This parabolic vision sets forth several truths in relation to Israel.

I.—That Israel was dead.

The death of a single body is the work of time, and sometimes a man is dying for half the term of his probation upon earth. Men may be afflicted with a mortal disease, and yet live long. And after death time must elapse before the human frame is reduced to the condition which is here pictured, when nothing is left but the "dry bones." The Hebrew nation had been long in dying. The extinction of all true spiritual life from the body politic did not take place suddenly. The nation had been long in coming to its present condition, when there was nothing left but its skeleton. Israel had really begun to die unto God and to live unto idolatry in the days immediately following the death of Joshua. "And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died . . . and also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor the works which He had done for Israel. . . . And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods" (Judges ii. 8-12). These words contain their history for ages, and now they were in that repulsive condition morally which is fitly represented by a valley of bones.

II.—That Israel would live again.

But as the death was not sudden, neither was the resurrection. There are several instances of sudden resurrection mentioned in the Bible which are not analagous with the resurrection pictured here. Lazarus rose immediately at the call of Christ, and when He addressed the widow's son at once "he sat up and began to speak" (Luke vii. 15). On the other hand, the raising of the Shunammite's son was marked by steps or gradations (see 2 Kings iv. 34, 35). But here the body is not only dead, but the very flesh has returned to its original dust; hence a considerable space of time elapses before the resurrec- is complete. The bones of Israel now lay in the valley of the Euphrates, there the message of God came to them in the person of His prophet. But the renewal of their spiritual life

would be the work of time. It would be "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" (Mark iv. 28). First "the bones came together," then as the prophet gazed, he saw "the sinews and the flesh come up upon them, and the skin covered them above." Finally, to make the living man "the breath came into them, and they lived." But it took seventy years of captivity to bring this to pass.

III.—That Israel was responsible for her resurrection.

This is not the case with other resurrections recorded in Scripture history. The child whom the prophet raised from the dead was a passive instrument in the hand of God. We shall have nothing to do with the resurrection of our bodies. God takes upon Himself all the responsibility of that. But the resurrection of character is, in this respect, entirely different. The dry bones were commanded to "hear the word of the Lord." Israel was called upon to do her part towards her resurrection. Although the power which raised the nation was in the hand of God, yet they were expected to do their part by the use of the means within their reach.

LESSONS.

I.—*That God has a special interest in dead souls.* The Incarnation of His Son proves this. God took the initiative, and Christ came unsought and undesired except by a few. God is a God of the dead as well as the living in this sense, that His desire is that they should live. He was interested in the dry bones, and shows His interest by breaking the silence on their behalf. And a like interest in dead souls has caused Him again and again to break silence through the ages. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son (Heb. i. 1, 2).

II.—*That God speaks to the living concerning the dead in order that they may speak to Him for them.* "Son of man,

can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again He said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord" (ver. 3, 4). The human father, who has some children whose feelings are in harmony with his own, finds in them co-workers who will help him to restore those who have strayed from home. The physician can enlist the services of his restored patients on behalf of those still smitten with disease. So the Great Father and Physician has been pleased to speak to some of His children concerning others, and to speak through them to the wanderers, and thus make them workers together with Himself (2 Cor. iii. 1). Our Lord spoke to Philip concerning the hungry multitude in order to beget faith within him (John vi. 5), and having done this, brought His omnipotence into operation and made His disciple a co-worker with Him. Here Jehovah takes His prophet into His counsel, and thereby awakens his faith on behalf of his dead countrymen, and then uses him to arouse them from their dead condition.

III.—*The present resurrection of dead souls is of far more importance to us than the future resurrection of dead bodies.* The renewal of Israel's spiritual life was the aim of God's chastisement. Without this a restoration to their land would have brought them no blessing. The fertility of that land, and its consequent blessedness as a dwelling-place, depended upon the character of its inhabitants (Deut. xxx. 9; Jer. xii. 4). The blessedness of the resurrection-body depends upon a present quickening from the death of "trespasses and sins" (Eph. ii. 1). The bare fact of the spirit being brought again to its old dwelling-place will bring no happiness to men. But a present resurrection unto life is not only a pledge of the quickening of our mortal bodies (Rom. viii. 11), but is an assurance that these bodies shall be raised to a *glorious* and *blessed* immortality.

SELECTED—I.

The primary and immediate scope of this vision is plain

from the explication that follows it (verses 11-14). But seeing the deliverance of the children of Israel out of their Babylonish captivity was typical of our spiritual redemption, we will handle it under this spiritual sense and meaning. We have,

I.—A dismal case supposed, and that is spiritual deadness. The people of God were not only in bondage under their enemies, but their souls were in a languishing condition. Deadness is incident unto a people externally in covenant with God. There is a total death incident unto the ungodly and a partial death incident to believers. This latter may arise, 1. From neglect of feeding upon Christ by faith, as neglect of food will bring the body into a pining and languishing condition. 2. Surfeiting the soul with sensual pleasure. 3. Inactivity and sloth. 4. The contagion of an evil example. 5. Some deadly wound in the soul not carefully noticed. A man may die by the cut of a sword as well as by a draught of poison.

II.—A blessed remedy here expressed, and that is, the breathings of the Spirit of the Lord. The influences of the Holy Ghost are here described. 1. From their *nature*, held out under the notion and metaphor of wind. Wind is of a cleansing, cooling, fructifying nature, and acts freely and irresistibly. So the influences of the Spirit cleanse and purify the heart; they allay the storms of conscience; they render the soul fruitful and they act with a sovereign freedom. 2. These influences are described from their *variety*, four winds. This imports the manifold influences and operations of the one Spirit. The Spirit has *convincing*, *enlightening*, *renewing*, *comforting*, *strengthening*, *sin-killing*, *interceding* (Rom. viii. 26), and *sealing* influences. 3. These influences are described from their *operation*, which is here called a breathing. Although the influences of the Spirit are very powerful, they act with an overcoming sweetness; there is no violence offered to any of the natural faculties of the soul. 4. These influences are described from the *end* and *effect* of their operation. "Breathe upon these slain that they may live." The life wrought in the

soul, by the in-breathing of the Holy Spirit, is a life of *faith*, a life of *justification*, a life of *holiness*, a life of *liberty*, a *comfortable* life, a *hidden* life, an *eternal* life.—*Abridged from E. Erskine.*

SELECTED—II.

"Doth he not speak parables?" is a question which men, looking round with heavy hearts upon the condition of Christ's Church in various periods of its existence, have asked themselves when they have read this vision. "Is not this written for the ages to come?" they have said. Yes, we shall find that Ezekiel is here, as everywhere, exhibiting laws and a method of Divine government which belong to all time. There is a principle of decay, a tendency to apostasy in every portion of the Church of God, and our hope for the future lies only in this, viz., that when the bones have become most dry; when they are lying most scattered and separate from each other, there is still a word going forth from Him who liveth for ever, saying, "These bones shall live."

And every shaking among the bones, everything which seems at first a sign of terror—men forsaking the traditions of their childhood—infidel questionings—are themselves not indeed signs of life, but at least movements in the midst of death, which foretell the approach of that which they cannot produce. All struggles after union, though they may be of the most abortive kind, though they may produce fresh divisions, yet indicate a deep and Divine necessity which men could not be conscious of in their dreams if they were not beginning to awake.—*F. D. Maurice.*

THE ASSAULT OF GOG AND GOD'S JUDGMENT ON HIM.

"*And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xxxviii. and xxxix.

"The prophetical delineation of the Divine principles of government is here thrown into the familiar forms of Old Testament relations. The final triumph of Messiah's truth over the most distant and barbarous nations is represented as a literal conflict on a gigantic scale, Israel being the battle-field, ending in the complete triumph of Israel's anointed King, the Saviour of the world" (*Fausset*). "This is a *prophetical* parable in which every trait in the delineation is full of important meaning, only couched in the language of a symbolical representation" (*Fairbairn*).

Looking at it as a whole it suggests—

I. That the forces of evil have in the past, and will in the future, strive to make aggression on the birthright of God's children.

Wherever good and bad men stand face to face, the one possessing rights to which the other has no claim, the evil will play the tyrant, and seek to bring the good down to his level. The first invasion of man's birthright took place ages before Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog. In the first human home in Eden we find innocence in the enjoyment of God-given rights, and we find also the forces of evil making successful aggression against that home, and taking away from our first parents their inheritance of bliss. From that time to the present, wherever a wicked man, or family, or nation, has come in contact with the good, the attempt has been repeated. Gog is here represented as invading Israel in their own land. "Thus saith the Lord God, In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy

place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army; and thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land" (chap. xxxviii. 14-16). These words embody the entire history of the relations of the world-powers and the Church of God. Where God has given an inheritance to his children, the devil has striven to take it away either by force or fraud.

II.—That the thoughts of the enemies of the Church are known to God before they enter the hearts of the men who think them.

"It shall come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: and thou shalt say, I will go up to the unwalled villages . . . to take a spoil and to take a prey," etc. (verses 10-12). The seat of all opposition to God and His people is in the heart. Evil action is first evil thought (Matt. xv. 19). In the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Cyrus we find God declaring His knowledge of a man's actions before his birth (Isa. xliv. 28). Here He claims a knowledge of men's most secret purposes even before they are conceived by men themselves. Truly "all thing are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. iv. 13). He can not only penetrate into the most secret hiding-places of the human soul and read what is being written there in the present, but can record the thought that will be registered there in the future. Well may we say with the Psalmist, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Psa. cxxxix. 6).

III.—Because the Church of God has such an omniscient Head it will finally triumph over the combined forces of evil in the world.

If the general of an invading army can obtain certain information respecting the intentions of an enemy, the battle is half won before a single shot has been fired. The knowledge of

the King of the Church of all the secret plans of its enemies is a guarantee of the Church's final victory, an assurance that all her enemies will find a grave where they expected to find a triumph. "I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel . . . and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude (chap. xxxix. 11). This earth, which has seen so many apparent victories of the wicked over the good, shall, after "the long ages of delay," be the place where the "seed of the woman" shall entirely and for ever bruise "the serpent's head." Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. . . . No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment shalt thou condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord (Isa. liv. 15, 17; see also Rev. xix. 11-21, xx. 7-10).

SELECTED—I.

We find in this prophecy some important truths.

I.—While the appearance of the new David to take the rule and presidency of God's heritage (chap. xxxiv), would have the effect of setting his people free from old troubles and dangers, and laying broad and sure the foundations of their peace, it would be very far from securing them against all future conflicts with evil. For the whole earth is Christ's heritage, and sooner or later it must come to an issue between those who hold His truth and the children of error and corruption.

II.—From the very nature of the case, this trial would fail to be made on a very large scale, and with most gigantic resources; for the battle-field now is the world, to its farthest extremities; and the question to be practically determined is, whether God's truth or man's sin is to have possession of the field. So that all preceding contests should appear small in comparison with this last great struggle, in which the world's destiny was to be decided.

III.—Though the odds in this conflict could not but appear beforehand very great against the people and cause of Christ, yet the result should be entirely on their side; and simply because with them is the truth and the might of Jehovah.

IV.—As all originated in the claim of Messiah and His truth to the entire possession of the world, so the whole is represented as ending in the complete establishment of His claim. The kingdom over all the earth is the Lord's, and a prospect stretches out before the Church of eternal peace and blessedness, in what have at length become the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.—*Fairbairn.*

SELECTED—II.

The phrases "latter years" and "latter days" (ch. xxxviii. 8 and 16) place the accomplishment of this prophecy in the times of the Messiah. So does the resumption in the Apocalypse. But as the beginnings of the outpouring of the spirit (ch. xxxix. 29), already occur in the times before Christ, so has our prophecy found a prelude to its fulfilment in the battles which the Jews had to fight with the Greek empire.

But one of its most glorious fulfilments was the victory of the true community of God over the Roman empire,—the same empire which had enslaved Israel after the flesh, the mere seeming Israel, destroyed its capital, scattered it in all the world, and by all this withdrawn from it the mask, all which was the necessary preparative to the victory of the true Israel, the legitimate continuation of the Old Testament covenant people. But the fulfilment is going forward even now. The breaking up of the Mahommedan empire before our own eyes is included under it. The glorious consummation belongs, according to the Apocalypse, to the end of the days.—*Hengstenberg.*

THE CHURCH OF GOD AS A TEMPLE.

"*In the visions of God brought He me to the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city on the south. And, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass . . . and behold, a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man's hand, a measuring reed of six cubits long; so he measured the breadth of the building, one reed, and the height one reed.*

. . . . .

"*He measured it by the four sides; it had a wall round about five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place. . . . And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate, whose prospect is towards the east. . . . And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name shall the house of Israel no more defile,*" *etc.*—Ezek. xl. 1-5, xli. 19, 20; xliii. 1-9.

These verses embrace the most prominent points of the vision, to which it seems impossible to attach a literal interpretation. The description given here of the temple, and, in the succeeding chapters, of the priesthood and the holy land and city, do not admit of fulfilment except in a spiritual sense. Lightfoot says, with regard to the dimensions of the temple and city, that "Ezekiel's temple is delineated larger than all the earthly Jerusalem, and his Jerusalem larger than all the land of Canaan. And thereby the scope of the Holy Spirit is clearly held out to signify the great enlarging of the spiritual Jerusalem and temple, the church under the gospel." It is obvious that this prophetical vision was not fulfilled after the return of the Jews from captivity in a literal sense, although the glory of the latter house was, indeed, *spiritually*, greater than the former (Hag. ii. 9); and to look forward to a future re-establishment of the Jewish temple and its service, would be a direct setting

aside of New Testament teaching, which declares that the ancient Jewish ritual and the place in which it was celebrated are entirely swallowed up in a temple, a priesthood, a sacrifice, and a city animated by "the power of an endless life" (Heb. vii. 16). Compare Hebrews vii. to x. The teaching of our Lord is against a literal interpretation of the prophecy. "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (John iv. 21-23). The mistake of such a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is illustrated in the misinterpretation of the Jews of the words of Malachi, "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet," etc. (ch. iv. 5). Our Lord expressly tells us that this prophecy does not refer to the Tishbite, but to one whose spirit and mission and teaching would resemble that of the ancient prophet. And there seems more to warrant a literal interpretation of the prophecy of Malachi than there does that of Ezekiel. Regarding therefore the words selected, in connection with their context, as a symbolic description of the Church of God in its perfected condition, we remark—

I.—The living temple of the living God will exhibit the characteristics of unity and diversity.

The Father of our spirits has made none of His intelligent creatures in all respects alike. There is as much difference in their gifts and characteristics as there is in their personal identity, and this variety must border upon the infinite. The idea of a temple involves the bringing together of a great variety of materials, each kind being adapted to serve a special purpose in the building. In the first earthly temple in which man offered his sacrifices of thanksgiving to God—the globe—we find an immense variety of material—an endless diversity of objects, all contributing to the beauty of the whole. So the Church of the redeemed will be made up of just men

made perfect, exhibiting the same diversities of soul as of external appearance. But the symbol of a temple brings before us more vividly the idea of *unity*. All the material is worked up into one harmonious whole, all together forms but one building expressing the *oneness* of the Church of the living God, a community dwelling in "the unity of the faith," a "body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth," animated by "one Spirit," living by union with "One God and Father of all" (Eph. iv. 4, 5, 13, 16).

II.—The Church of God will be the abode of purity.

The word temple involves this idea. A temple is a building set apart, consecrated to a religious use. This temple is represented as being surrounded by a wall of separation. The ancient temple at Jerusalem had been dedicated to the worship of Jehovah. But it had been merely dead stones that were so consecrated. The cold, dead building had been unconscious of the God who had dwelt within it. Hence God had, under the old dispensation, declared its inferiority to the humblest living and contrite soul (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2). But the living temple will be one of spiritual and conscious purity. The distinctive element in it will be that "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth" (Rev. xxi. 27).

III.—This Church of the future will include what was symbolised by the temple of the past.

In the beginning of a human life there seems a very little of the spiritual, a great preponderance of the material. But as the child grows, the intellectual and moral part of the man developes itself, until by-and-bye, if the ideal manhood is reached, the animal part of the man is swallowed up in the spiritual part. Even the intellectual and spiritual Paul once thought as a child and spake as a child (1 Cor. xiii. 11). The Mosaic dispensation had been given in the spiritual childhood of the world. The people whom it

was designed to teach had much of the material and little of the spiritual in their nature. Hence they had to be instructed by what the author of the epistle to the Hebrews calls "carnal ordinances." But as men become more spiritual the inward realities take the place of the outward symbols, and the perfected spiritual Church will embrace all the truth that was shadowed forth in the Jewish dispensation.

IV.—The dimensions of this spiritual Church can be taken by heavenly measurement only.

Solomon's temple could be measured by a human hand, the temple of Ezekiel's vision needed an angel of God to measure it. It was so vast that it is represented as covering a space equal to that formerly occupied by the city of Jerusalem itself; its size could not be rightly estimated by an inhabitant of earth or by earthly measures. The Church of the redeemed will consist of a multitude which "no *man* can number" (Rev. vii. 9).

V.—This temple of purity is the dwelling-place of God.

The living spirit inhabits the human body so long as that body remains in a certain state of purity and unity, viz., so long as it can, by the retaining of its animal life, resist the decomposition which sets in immediately after death. The living spirit is a temple for the living God; the spirit of the first man was created a pure, and, therefore, a meet dwelling-place for His Creator. But the death of sin defiled it, and it became in a condition analogous to that in which the body is found after the departure of the living spirit. God refused to live in such a dwelling-place, even as He refused to remain in the Jewish temple when it was polluted by false gods (see chap. x. 18). But God in this vision is represented as returning to the new temple in which He would dwell for ever, indicating His willingness to return and dwell with man when he is separated from his sin (2 Cor. vi. 16, 17), and foretelling the glorious day when the Church of perfect purity shall "come down from God

out of heaven, and the tabernacle of God shall be with it for evermore (Rev. xxi. 2, 3).

SELECTED—I.

This description presents to us—

I.—The *extent* and *latitude* of the Church under Christ. He measured the gate to the east, and the east side, to show that the eastern people should be of the Christian Church. And the north, south, and west sides, to assure us that the people of those parts should come to Zion. Christ sent His apostles to all nations. The Church of Christ is all the world over.

II.—The *stability* and *firmness* of the Church. The temple here measured was a perfect square. Such buildings are most firm and lasting. Such is the Church; "the gates of hell cannot prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). It is built upon Christ the chief corner-stone (Ephes. ii. 20), and is established in righteousness (Isa. liv. 14).

III.—The *beauty* of the Church. Such a building Ezekiel saw. The Church is the most beautiful and comely thing in the world to such as have spiritual eyes. When the bride of a great prince hath on her royal apparel, is she not beautiful and glorious? Such is the Church, "arrayed with fine linen, the righteousness of saints" (Rev. xix. 8; xxi. 10, 11).

IV.—The *sanctity* of the Church. The Church of God is a company called out from the world. The Corinthians were "called" to be saints (1 Cor. i. 2). The Macedonian churches gave themselves to the Lord (2 Cor. viii. 5). See also 1 Pet. ii. 9. As a wall of separation was built around this temple, so God hath set a wall of discipline between the world and the church.—*Greenhill.*

SELECTED—II.

I do not doubt that Ezekiel here saw the pattern of a spiritual society, possessing a real unity, inhabited by a Divine

presence, resting on the Divine name. But we must remember, first, not to confound the pattern with the earthly forms which set it forth; secondly, we must assure ourselves that whatever is spiritual and substantial will seek to find some expression for itself, to make the things of earth into mirrors which may reflect at least a portion of its glory. . . . . The temple was to be the building which denoted the restoration of the national society. . . . A spiritual temple is to make its influence felt in *this* world. Heaven cannot be divorced from earth. The struggle to effect this could only make earth fantastical and heaven material. When the Kingdom of God is *within* us, then we shall find that the brass, the stone, the iron, the gold, are stubborn materials, only because we have allowed them to be tyrannical masters; that we can subdue the powers and properties of nature when we claim them for Him who gave Himself to be the lowest of all; and who is therefore exalted above all. . . . . Jews possessed of these convictions may be destined in some wonderful manner to instruct all nations in them by a restored city of which the Son of David is the acknowledged King, by a restored temple which He will again claim as His Father's house, and will not suffer to be a house of merchandise.—*Abridged from F. D. Maurice.*

THE TEMPLE WATERS.

"*Afterward he brought me again into the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward. . . . And it shall come to pass, that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live. . . . . And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on this side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed; it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.*"—Ezek. xlvii. 1-12.

Observe,—

I.—The healing, because living waters came from the midst of the Temple.

In the midst of Eden there was a well-head of water which, after it had watered the garden of God, divided into four rivers and went forth to fertilize the whole of the surrounding country. So the Church of God does not absorb all the blessings of the Gospel within herself; the whole world is to be blest through the Church. The leaves of the tree of life which John saw by the side of the river of God were "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). Hence the parting charge of our Lord, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15).

II.—The source of this stream of blessing—the living God.

God had returned to dwell among His people before the stream of life issued forth (chap. xliii. 7-9). The river of the Apocalyptic vision has its origin in the "throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. xxii. 1). He only is the well of Living Water (John iv). The Eternal God is self-sustaining. His

blessedness is from Himself and His store is enough to satisfy, not merely a few of His creatures, but the universe itself. His living temple can drink of "the river of His pleasures" (Psa. xxxvi. 8), and find an overflow sufficient for the needs of every sin-stricken soul. "For with Thee is the fountain of life" (Psa. xxxvi. 9).

III.—The river of life will widen in its influence, and therefore increase the blessedness of the race as it flows onward.

The longer the waters flowed, the wider and deeper the river became (verses 3-5). This is the law of a river, and therefore it is a most fit emblem of the blessed influences of God's kingdom. Beginning, as it did, with the small number of disciples whom Christ left upon the earth, it has gradually increased in its power among the nations of the world, until it has acquired the width and depth which we see to-day. And it must, from the necessity of its nature, go on to grow until the whole earth shall acknowledge the Crucified as King. "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem, ... and the Lord shall be King over all the earth" (Zech. xiv. 8, 9).

IV.—This river of living water will change the curse into a blessing.

Wherever the waters came, "they healed." The sea, of verse 8, is generally considered by commentators to be the Dead Sea, whose existence is a most vivid illustration of the death which follows sin.

When the stream of life flows into this sea of death, it, too, shall become living and life-sustaining. Its waters shall abound with fish, and its hitherto solitary shores shall be thronged with busy men. So is it with every sin-blighted soul. As the touch of God in Christ healed the bodily diseased, so the same life-giving hand can and will heal the soul. And when the earth is filled with healed souls the curse pronounced at Eden will be no more (Rev. xxii. 3).

We learn from the whole subject,—

I.—That until God's gospel comes into contact with the soul of man it is dead. Where the river did not come, and while it did not come, there was death. Where there is nothing to refresh the earth there can be no fruitfulness nor beauty, and consequently no life. God is the life of the soul, and nothing less than the life-giving flow of His salvation into it can give it fruitfulness and beauty.

II.—It is a Divine ordinance to bless some by means of others. This law is in operation in every-day life. Those who have good in their life or circumstances which others lack are expected by man, and ordained by God, to minister the same "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter iv. 10). The Dead Sea of the human ignorance of the young is a sea into which the waters of knowledge must flow, if the coming generation is to be an improved edition of the present. But this healing water must come to them through the knowledge of others,—from minds that are filled with the waters of knowledge. Those who have riches are expected to minister to the wants of those who are in poverty. If a wealthy man does not help his poor brethren he is cursed by man and condemned by God. And it is pre-eminently the duty of those who have the riches of spiritual knowledge to be the channels of spiritual blessing and life to those who are spiritually ig-ignorant and dead. And God has ordained that it shall be so. The church of God in the first ages possessed the living Spirit of God in the hearts of her members, and though God had ordained that Christ's kingdom should extend to all nations yet these nations could only be reached by human souls who carried within them the wells of salvation. Wherever spiritual life and health was, or is found in the world, it was first carried there by a human soul who had believed, and consequently out of whose heart had "flowed rivers of living water" (John vii. 37). And so the waters from the living temple have gone

forth, and still flow forth, to heal the Dead Sea of a sin-stricken world.

SELECTED—I.

The fruitfulness of Scripture is the subject which I propose to deduce from the image suggested in the text. I propose to consider the germ of life which it has been in all the noblest regions of man's activity, with its productive energy impregnating the world, until everything has lived where these healing waters have come; this Word, approving itself still as the unfolder and sustainer of all the nobler life of the world, and thus as being of Him from whom alone any good and perfect gift can come. . . . It has been well and memorably said that the great and standing evidence for Christianity is Christendom; and it was with good reason that the early apologists of the faith, albeit they had not such a full-formed Christendom as we have to appeal to, did yet, when the adversaries boasted of their Appolonius, and other such shadowy personages, and sought to set them up as rivals and competitors of the Lord of glory, make answer by demanding, "What came of these men? What society did they found? or were any mighty footmarks left upon the earth to witness that greater than mortals have trodden it?" And the same answer is good when it is transferred to the books which at any time have made ungrounded claim to be placed upon a level with the Canonical Scriptures.

Remark,—

I.—How productive the Holy Scriptures *have been in the past*, even in regions of inward life and activity. Nourished by the Christian books, by the great thoughts which Christ set stirring in the heart of humanity, and of which these books kept a lasting record, there has unfolded itself a poetry infinitely greater, an art infinitely higher than any which the old world had seen. Poetry henceforward became, not the play of the spirit, but its holiest earnest; and the Book, which does not talk about such matters, which does not

make beauty, but holiness, its end and aim has been the truest nourisher out of which any genuine art has ever proceeded, the truest fosterer of beauty, in that it is the nourisher of the affections, the sustainer of the relations between God and men. For these affections being laid waste, those relations being broken, art is first stricken with barrenness, and then pines and dies, even as that ancient art, which had been so fruitful once, was, when the Church was born, already withering and dying under the influence of the scepticism, the profligacy, the decay of family and national life, the extinction of religious faith, which marked the time when Christ came, and cast in His Word, as that which should make all things new, into the midst of a decrepit and worn-out world.

II.—How fruitful is the in-coming of the Word of Christ *now*, when it kindles for the first time a savage people into life. How does it seem to brood with a creative warmth and energy over all the rudiments of a higher life which lay in that people's bosom, and yet but for this could never have come to the birth. How does it arrest that centrifugal progress of sin, which is ever drawing the men, or the nations, that have wandered out of the sphere of the Divine attraction, further and further from God, the true centre of their being. Tribes which were in danger of utterly and literally perishing from the face of the earth, victims of that uttermost degradation which had caused them at length to let go even those lowest arts by which even animal existence is sustained—even these that Word finds, and in these nurses the dying embers of life, till the savage reawakens to the consciousness of a man, and the horde begins to knit itself into the promise of a nation.

III.—Nor does it need that we look abroad to be reminded of what this Word has done. He who, tolerably acquainted with the past history of the Church, passes over Scripture, may, in some moods of his mind, pass over it as over a succession of battle-fields. For, at every step he advances, he recog-

nizes that which has been the motive of some mighty and long-drawn conflict, wherein the keenest spirits, the mightiest intellects of their day, were engaged. He meets with that, to maintain their conviction about which men have been content to spend their lives, to make shipwreck of their worldly hopes, have dwelt in deserts, in caves, and in dungeons, yea, gladly have encountered all from which nature most, and most naturally, shrinks. All things have lived whithersoever these waters which issue from the sanctuary have come. Shall not our hearts live also, until we, too, have like reason with the Psalmist for prizing the testimonies of God, even because with them He has quickened us?—*Adapted from Archbishop Trench.*

SELECTED—II.

This view enters into Messianic times. From the restored Temple salvation goes forth to the whole world. Under the figure of water, salvation is often presented in Scripture. The saving waters, that, in Psalm xlvi. 5, first belong only to Zion, are here led out to the heathen. The figure is explained in several places. In Psa. xxxvi. 9, the river denotes the fulness of delight which the Lord pours upon His own. (See also Isa. xii. 3, Rev. vii. 17.) According to these passages, water signifies life, a powerful, happy life, disturbed by no hindrance. Ezekiel here expands what Joel has indicated (chap. iii. 18), and Zechariah points back to Ezekiel (chap. xiv. 8). In the measuring of the waters, the thought is, that the Messianic salvation, at first small in appearance, will unfold itself in ever-richer fulness, while the streams of worldly enterprise are streams whose waters lie (Isa. lviii. 11, Job vi. 15-20). The desert (verse 8) is, in Scripture, a figure of ungodliness—a suitable emblem of the world estranged from God and excluded from His kingdom, to which applies the words in Psa. cviii. 5. (See Isa. xxxv. 6.) But the prophet turns immediately to a more striking figure of ungodliness in the Dead Sea. Von Banner says (p. 61), "The sea is called Dead because there is in it no green plants, no waterfowl, no fish. If the Jordan

carries fish into it, they die." This explains verses 8–10. As a symbol of the corrupt world lying in wickedness (1 John v. 19), the Dead Sea is the more appropriate, as it owes its *origin* to a judgment of God on the corrupt world, and the spiritual eye discerns under its waves the figure of Sodom and Gomorrah. As there is in the Dead Sea no other being than those who wrestle with death or have yielded to it, so also its counterpart, the world, is a great charnel-house. They only merit the name of living beings, after the waters of the sanctuary have overcome the substances hostile to life. If the fish be the men who have attained to life by the Messianic salvation, the fishers can only be the messengers of that salvation, who introduce those who are quickened into the communion of the Church (Luke v. 11, etc.). "Its mire and its marshes that are not healed" (verse 11), refers to the morasses and marshes of the Dead Sea which are cut off from connection with the main sea when the water subsides. In the Dead Sea of the world, the swamps and marshes are originally of the same nature as the main sea; the only difference is, that they have cut themselves off from the healing waters. That the trees bring forth new fruit every month (verse 12) indicates the uninterrupted enjoyment of salvation. The salvation must present itself for the deadly, sick, heathen world, before all, in the form of saving grace. Therefore, beside the nourishing fruits, are named also the healing leaves.—*Hengstenberg.*

THE CITY OF THE FUTURE AND ITS PRINCES.

"*Thus saith the Lord God; let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord God. Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath . . . . . And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings to make reconciliation for the house of Israel . . . . . Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; but he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession. . . . . And the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there.*"—Ezek. xlv. 9, 10, 17 ; xlvi. 18 ; xlviii. 35.

Consider, first, what this vision of the future city would be to Ezekiel. If a man standing upon the blackened ruins of a house which had been to him a dearly-loved home could see in the future a vision of a fairer dwelling under whose roof were gathered elements of blessedness which had not entered into his home-life in the past, that vision of joy to come would lessen, or perhaps annihilate the sense of present loss. This was the intention of the on-look into the future which was granted by God to his sorrowing prophet. He stood, as it were, upon the ruins of his beloved city, saying—"Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste" (Isa. lxiv. 10, 11). And he knew that these outward desolations were but visible signs of the moral desolation of His people. Then how cheering to this seer and priest and citizen of the Jewish theocracy to see in vision the more glorious city of the future

arise out of the ashes of the past. Three features of the new city would afford Ezekiel especial consolation for the condition of the ancient Jerusalem. 1. The new city would have *righteous rulers* (ch. xlv. 9, 10, 17; xlvi. 18). This had been a great want in the Jerusalem of the past. There had been a lack of righteousness, and therefore a lack of that peace which can only come by righteousness (Isa. xxxii. 16). This truth had been deeply felt by David at the end of his reign. In his prayer for Solomon (Psa. lxxii.), he had declared that the "mountains" and the "hills" should bring "peace to the people by righteousness" (verse 3). In the new city *righteousness* holds a foremost place. There is to be a righteous ruler in the stead of those who had formerly ruled "with force and cruelty," who had "ate the fat and clothed themselves with the wool," and "scattered the flock," as described in chap. xxxiv. 2. The transactions of the *people with one another* were to be characterised by righteousness. "Just balances and a just ephah" were to take the place of the extortion and "greedy gain" of the past (Ezek. xxiii. 12). And this foundation of righteousness would be an assurance to the prophet of the *permanence* of the new commonwealth. Then would the prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled: "In *righteousness* shalt thou be *established*; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come nigh thee" (Isa. liv. 14). 3. But the chief source of comfort would come to Ezekiel from the *name* of the new city. This would be at once the cause and the effect of its righteousness. Where God dwelt there must be purity, and His return to dwell among His people was dependent upon their putting away the iniquity of the past (chap. xliii. 9). The visible and manifest token of the favourable presence of Jehovah had long ago been withdrawn from the once-favoured city (chap. xi. 23), and this event had been the beginning of the end of the visible kingdom of God in Judea. From the absence of God's favourable presence came all the after troubles. Upon the presence of the sunlight depends all the beauty and the joy of the earth.

When it can be said of any portion of the globe that the sun does not shine there, the name of that place is *death*. And where the sun is found shining in its meridian splendour, day after day, the name of that place is *life*. So the absence of God's favour from Jerusalem made it the place of death morally and materially. The name of it came to be "Ichabod" (1 Sam. iv. 21). But the future city, whether a material or a spiritual one, was to be a city in which God would be, in a favourable sense. And this to the prophet meant spiritual life, and beauty, and usefulness. This living presence of the living God would make the city that was to be an embodiment of the ancient promise, "Oh, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa. liv. 11-13).

Lessons.

I.—The end of all symbolic teaching is to bring heaven down to earth. It is like a telescope in the hand of a man on a half-wrecked vessel which brings near to him some peaceful village on the shore. It may be a hazy and partial view, but it is all that can be obtained with the means which are at hand, and serves to give some idea of the reality. So with earthly symbols of spiritual realities. They must be very dim and imperfect images of the great, unutterable things which are to make up the perfect future; but they are all that can be given to us, seeing that the only materials of which they can be formed must be taken from the limited quarry of our senses and experience. God Himself is weak through our flesh to reveal to us any more. The best things of Ezekiel's past were brought together in this vision with all that made them precious and glorious intensified and enlarged, as the most expressive sym-

bols within reach of his comprehension of the spiritual glory of the latter days and of the heavenly world.

II.—The end of thus bringing heaven down to earth is to bring earth up to heaven. We must know the standard to which we are to attain before we can direct our aim towards it. The conception of a perfectly righteous society must come down out of heaven from God before men will begin to struggle after a righteous life. To know that perfectness is possible to God's creatures is the first step towards the attainment of it. God shows us what heaven is like that we may pray and strive that His "kingdom may come," and His will be done on earth as it is done there.

III.—That an external manifestation of the absolute righteousness of the human race is to be desired and expected. Life is manifested in form. The life of a flower is seen in the beauty which appeals to our eye. And so the life of God will manifest itself in outward form. There is to be "a manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 19). But as the gardener must *wait* for the life in the young plant to manifest itself in the perfect flower, so the external manifestation of the righteousness within the man must be waited for. God will bring about the one and the other in His own good time. And as the florist bases his confident expectation of the flower upon the laws of nature, we base ours upon the more certain promises of God. It has been the hope and desire of the best men in all ages, and God's revelation assures us that they shall not be disappointed.

SELECTED—I.

The goings out of the city of God are toward the four quarters of the world; its power, like its mission, extends to all places; yea, our faith is the victory that overcometh the world. The names of the gates are the names of the tribes; the names of the tribes are the names of the sons of Israel; thus the gates taken together are the whole of Israel—that is,

however, Israel in spirit and in truth. In this holy city, which represents the Church of Christ, the Lord is always graciously present (Matt. xviii. 20; xxviii. 20. Comp. also Jno. xiv. 23). When the Lord dwells in us, then our hope ascends to the New Jerusalem, which cometh down from heaven.—*Heimoff, from Lange's Commentary.*

SELECTED—II.

Summary of the entire vision (chapters xl.-xlviii.) :—

I.—In the gospel times there is to be on the part of Jehovah a solemn occupation anew of His sanctuary, in which the entire fulness of the Divine glory shall dwell and manifest itself. At the last, there is to rise a new temple, diverse from the old, to be made every way suitable to that grand and lofty intention, and worthy of it; in particular, of vast compass for the new community, and with a holiness stretching over the entire extent of the temple, so that in this respect there should no longer be any distinction between the different parts. Throughout, everything is subjected to the most exact and particular appointments; individual parts, and especially such as had formerly remained indeterminate obtain now an immediate Divine sanction; so that every idea of arbitrariness must be altogether excluded from this temple. Accordingly, this sanctuary is the thoroughly sufficient, perfect manifestation of God for the salvation of His people (chap. xl., xliii. 12).

II.—From this sanctuary, as from the new centre of all religious life, there gushes forth an unbounded fulness of blessings upon the people, who, in consequence, attain a new condition. There come also into being a new glorious worship, a truly acceptable priesthood, and theocratic ruler, and equity and righteousness reign among the entire community, who, being purified from all stains, rise indeed to possess the life that is in God (chap. xlii. 13, xlvii. 12).

III.—To the people who have become renewed by such blessings, the Lord gives the land of promise; Canaan is a

second time divided among them, where, in perfect harmony and blessed fellowship, they serve the living God, who abides and manifests Himself among them (chap. xlvii. 13, xlviii.)—*Havernick.*

THE GREAT IMAGE.

"*Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and break them to pieces,*" *etc.*—Dan. ii. 31-36.

The interpretation of this dream is given by Daniel in verses 37 to 45. The kingdoms there spoken of are generally identified with the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, or Macedonian, and the Roman empires. Commentators are, however, divided as to whether the last-named empire is the one which is signified by the legs of iron, and feet mingled with clay (see note).

Notice—

I.—The fact that all world-kingdoms destitute of goodness will end in dust.

The human body in its present condition has not enough immortal life within it to keep it from ending in dust. There are but three exceptions on record of exemption from this general rule, and then a higher law was brought into play to prevent the ordinary one from asserting its power. But unless such a higher law overtake us, we are sure to end as we began, in dust. This is the doom of the great kingdoms of the world who are destitute of sufficient morality to preserve themselves in existence. The image with its golden head, its silver breast,

its brazen thighs, its iron legs, was soon mingled with the clay in fragments, which were "like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors" which the wind carried away.

II.—That the older the world becomes, the less enduring and the more worthless are the mere world-kingdoms.

After the human body has attained the strength of manhood, the longer it lives the less powerful it becomes. It is of less worth to the man who owns it in proportion to his age, because it becomes more and more feeble. The longer anything that is dying lives, the less valuable it is. Those who are dying morally, become of less and less worth in the world the longer they continue in it. So with all kingdoms founded upon a mere worldly basis. The first kingdom was of gold, and the last of iron and clay; and this because merely physical power becomes of less worth in proportion to the progress of the world by the development of moral force.

III.—The contrast between the kingdoms of the world and that of Christ, in the contrast between the image and the stone.

1. In relation to *size*. The image was great and terrible, the stone was small and insignificant.

2. In the *materials* of which they were composed. The image was formed of several minerals, but there was no rock-like material among them. The stone was of *one* substance, viz., granite or rock.

3. In their *origin*. The image symbolised kingdoms which had been built up by human agency; the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, it had not a human origin.

4. In their *strength*. The stone gave one blow, and the image fell to pieces and became as chaff.

5. In their *place in human history*. The image left a space in the world, and the stone filled the vacancy.

6. In the *length* of their *existence*. The image thus breaking up, endured but for a limited period. It lasted but the length

of a night-vision in comparison with the stone, which contained within itself the power of an endless life.

Lessons.

I.—God may instruct a *saint* through the brain of a *sinner*. In the history of God's Church there are many instances of His visits to heathen. Whenever they have been so visited there has been a threefold result. There has been, in the first place, the direct instruction of the heathen man himself by the message which he has received. Then he has been the means of revealing some truth to a servant of the living God. And, lastly, both have learnt the mutual lesson that God had not forsaken those who were not included in the covenant which He made with Abraham. God gave Abraham a homily on the sin of lying by Abimelech (Gen. xxvi). By Pharaoh He taught Joseph that He "is not slack concerning His promise." And here Daniel is instructed by Nebuchadnezzar. His faith is helped, and his hopes are quickened by the revelation of a truth which is the light of the Gentiles and the glory of history and of Israel, and which is made known to him through the dream of a man who was outside the favoured nation of which Daniel was one of the most beloved saints. Both king and prophet learn that though God is with the *saint*, He has not forsaken the *sinner*.

II.—That all the materials of the world may be used, and so consecrated, as means of illustrating Divine truth. The gold, the silver, etc, were used to set forth the destruction of evil, and the triumph of good. The dead wire, can, by its connection with the electric light, be transformed into a thing of beauty. The most commonplace things can be ennobled by being the vehicles of moral teaching.

III.—We must judge, not according to appearances, but according to the inherent strength of things and persons. The expectant on-lookers at the coming contest between the youth

of Bethlehem and the giant of Gath might have concluded as to the issue of the conflict before it began. But there was that in David which more than made up for the bulk of his adversary, and the victory was with faith and not with size. It did not seem to those who saw the child of Bethlehem as if there was any comparison in the power possessed by Him and that wielded by Augustus Ceasar. But time has declared that Jesus won the day, and that He still goes forth "conquering and to conquer," because in Him there is the "life" which is "the light of men." The small unlikely-looking stone broke the great and terrible image.

IV.—Sin will not resign its dominion unless it be *smitten*. If a man is possessed by an evil habit, which tyrannises over him and holds him at arm's length, he will find that he cannot cast out this devil by gentle persuasion and long speeches. He must *smite* the evil spirit, or he will never drive him out. The great want of a human soul in the present century is, not to persuade it that hell is a myth of the middle-ages, but to teach it how to smite the hell in possession.

V.—There can be no success against evil unless we are connected with the supernatural. The moonlight of the orient is very beautiful to look upon, but it is not equal in its power to bless the earth to one ray of the sun. It would not quicken a single seed into life if it were to shine upon it for a thousand years. There are virtuous people in the world who are not Christians. There have been some bright examples of such among heathen nations. But they could make no head against sin around them, even if they had no strong tendencies to gross or palpable sin within. Sin within us, or around us, can only be smitten through connection with a "stronger than the strong man armed," who has Himself smitten evil by a sinless life and an atoning death.

Note. "The common opinion, that by the fourth kingdom

is intended the Roman empire, is supported by the following considerations: 1. The obvious design of the image was to symbolise the succession of great monarchies which would precede the setting up of the kingdom of Christ, and which would have an important agency in preparing the world for that. The Roman empire was too important to be omitted from such an enumeration. 2. The kingdom here referred to was to be in existence at the time symbolised by the cutting of the stone out of the mountain. But the kingdoms of the Seleucidae, etc., which sprung up after Alexander the Great (which those who reject the old view consider are the kingdoms signified), had ceased before the time of Christ. 3. Unless the Roman power be represented the symmetry of the image is destroyed; for it would make what was, in fact, one kingdom represented by two different metals—brass and iron. The empire founded by Alexander, and continued through his successors in Syria and Egypt, was in fact one kingdom. It the appellation of *brass* belonged to that kingdom *as* a Greek kingdom, there is an obvious incongruity, and a departure from the method of interpreting the other portions of the image, in applying the term *iron* to any portion of that kingdom. 4. The term *iron* implied that the kingdom referred to would be distinguished for *strength*—strength greater than its predecessors. But this was *not* true of the confused reigns which immediately followed Alexander. It *was* true, however, of the Roman power. 5. The fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is evidently the same which is represented by the fourth beast in Dan. vii. 7, 8, 23, 25. And the reference there is to the Roman empire."—(*Barnes.*) The arguments against the fourth kingdom being the Roman empire are various, but the principal one given in Langé's Commentary is, "That the figure of a stone, that destroys the image, is false as a representation of the triumph of Christianity over the world-power, if the Roman power be regarded as the fourth and final development of the latter; for this was not overthrown and destroyed suddenly by the kingdom of Christ, but it incor-

porated Christianity itself, and continued, as Christianised Rome, to bear rule over the earth during more than a thousand years."

SELECTED—I.

It is a striking picture of the young conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, that, not content with the vista of future greatness before him, he was looking on beyond our little span of life, which in youth so fills the mind, to a future, when his own earthly life should be closed. *O king*, says Daniel, *thy thoughts came up upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter.* It is remarkable also that in this revelation of the vicissitude of human greatness the heathen king is the organ and first depository; Daniel is but its expositor. This change in the organ of prophecy is in remarkable harmony with those former revelations through the prophets. To them the foreground is the kingdom of God, as already existing among them. The development of that kingdom is the subject of their prophecies. From this foreground they looked out on the powers of the world, as they bore upon His people, and as they should hereafter be absorbed into it or punished for their misdeeds against it. To Nebuchadnezzar, God exhibits, as *his* foreground, the empire of the world as it should develope in its different stages, until it should at last be confronted by the kingdom of God. The form exhibited is man in colossal majesty. Human power, consolidated by human wisdom, has a majesty, lent to it by God, even while it abuses the God-entrusted gift. The intense nothingness of man's might in its highest estate, and so of his own also, and the might of God's kingdom apart from all human strength, are the chief subjects of this vision as explained to Nebuchadnezzar. Doubtless the parts of the human figure and the metals have their significance. The head of gold has a unity, a magnificence, an insight of its own; it is not only the first empire as to time, the conception of the whole world-empire lay in it and in him whom it chiefly represented. The inferiority of the second empire is symbolised by the

silver, inferior not in value only, but in solidity and power of resistance. The form, moreover, in the human figure is twofold, and the right is stronger than the left. The kingdom which was to succeed Nebuchadnezzar's was not only to be inferior to it, but was to be compounded of two parts, the one stronger than the other. This already suggests the Medo-Persian empire. The third empire in its dark lowering colour is at first sight remarkably combined, "the belly and thighs." Yet the lower part of the human figure singularly combines the greatest activity and strength with the dullest, most inactive, proverbial sluggishness. Just so were the two parts of Alexander's empire contrasted. The old fierce energy of Egypt and the Mesopotamian power were gone. The loins of Greece held together the belly of Asia, yet could not impart to it its own activity. And, one at first, it is then represented in the thighs, as two great portions only united by a common connection with the upper part. Nothing could more exactly represent the two subdivisions of Alexander's empire—the account of which is expanded to Daniel in chapter xi.—those by which his people were most affected. The kingdoms of the Seleucidae and the Ptolemies, ever at variance, had no unity except as they were connected by the great empire plan of Alexander. But they carried out that interpenetration of the Greek and Oriental nations which prepared the way for the gospel by the diffusion of the Greek language. In the fourth empire we have greater strength ending in greater division; yet retaining to the end, in its several portions, its original iron might. Its chief characteristic is its strength. Twofold in its form, as the Roman power, itself one, came to be divided into East and West, it ends in yet further division into ten kingdoms, and the iron commingles itself with a material as plastic as itself is unyielding, *potter's clay*. This, as Daniel interprets it, expresses the later condition of the empire, strong, as before in some parts, yet side by side with weakness, partly through its union with that which was foreign to itself, through intermarriages, whereby the two powers do not cohere. Of the

last empire no one doubts that it is the kingdom of Christ. Above eighteen centuries have verified the prediction of the permanency of that kingdom, founded, as it was, by no human means, endowed with inextinguishable life, ever conquering and to conquer; a kingdom one and alone since the world has been; embracing all climes and times, and still expanding; unworn by that destroyer of all things, time; strong amid the decay of empires; the freshness and elasticity of youth written on the brow which has outlived eighteen centuries.—*Dr. Pusey.*

THE FOUR BEASTS.

"*I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another,*" *etc.*—Dan. vii. 1-28.

"This chapter is concerned with the prophecies of the rise and fall of Medo-Persia, the rise of Græco-Macedonia on its ruins, and the fourfold kingdom of Alexander the Great's successors. Out of one of the four divisions of the latter sprang Antiochus Epiphanes, the great persecutor of the Jews, who "took away the daily sacrifice, and cast down the place of the sanctuary" (verse 11).—*(Collin's Commentary.)* "The principal force, and greatest interest of the prophetic descriptions of this chapter, centre in the *fourth world-kingdom*, and in its development as an anti-Christian power, which immediately prepares the way for the judicial advent of Christ. . . . . Each of the four beasts which, in this instance, represent the world-kingdoms, is drawn with nervous and strongly-characterising strokes that admit of no doubt respecting their identity with the four constituents of the image; but the attention of the narrator is principally directed to the fourth beast, and to the horn which denotes the height of the development of the world-power.—*Lange's Commentary.*

Notice,—

I.—The element out of which the world-kingdoms came into existence. "Four beasts came up from the sea."

The sea, when looked at in some of its aspects, is a most fit symbol of the means by which human kingdoms without godliness have made progress in the world.

1. There is the element of *treachery*. The sea is at one moment calm, and apparently harmless, and the next, sending a nation into mourning, by overwhelming her vessels, and casting their crews into the depths of the ocean. Treachery has played a large part in the creation of the kingdoms of the world.

2. The element of *restless change*. From its creation until the present moment, its waters have not been at rest for a single hour. The history of nations is one of constant change, out of which new empires arise.

3. The element of *destructiveness*. The sea is a terribly destroying power, and kingdoms without godliness found their empires upon the destruction of individuals, of countries, of smaller kingdoms. The Babylonian, the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Roman empires were *destructive* rather than *constructive* forces in the world.

II.—The creatures which are used as symbols of the world-kingdoms. "Four beasts."

The characteristics of these kingdoms were animal rather than human. There is no true humanity where there is no divinity. He who has in him nothing of God cannot be a man in the true sense of the word. These kingdoms of the parabolic vision are symbolised by beasts of prey noted for their strength and cruelty and treachery; no animal of a gentle, peaceful nature is found among them, denoting the entire absence of those characteristics in kingdoms without godliness.

III.—The kingdom that arose last out of the sea of time exceeded those that had gone before it in cruelty and power.

It was "terrible and dreadful and strong exceedingly;" no mere animal could set forth all its destructive power; it had "iron teeth" and "ten horns." The longer wickedness goes on unchecked the more its evil tendencies develope themselves, and the more it spreads desolation in the world. It gathers into itself all the phases of iniquity that have gone before it, and includes them all within itself, as the full-blown flower includes within itself the bud, or the man includes within himself the child.

IV.—A truly human kingdom cannot arise out of any element of earth, it must come from above. "The Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven," etc. (verses 13, 14).

The head of every kingdom except Christ's kingdom has been a mere man, and to every one of these symbolised here God could say, "Ye are from beneath." But the Son of Man was "from above" (John viii. 23), and He came to be the head of a kingdom of true humanity. The subjects of His kingdom become partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4), and therefore this kingdom exhibits none of the characteristics set forth by the beasts. It is a human kingdom because it is a Divine kingdom. Therefore it is an everlasting kingdom. The kingdom that is not of the world shall possess the world. "Thine is the kingdom."

This vision teaches us—

I.—The knowledge of the Eternal in relation to human affairs in the ages to come. An illustration is here given of the declaration of Jehovah in Isa. xliv. 6-8. "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show unto them. . . . Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."

II.—That God has stretched a measuring line across the

bounds of every kingdom. He has appointed the bounds of their habitation.

III.—Human kingdoms form a dark background to reveal the beauties of the kingdom of Christ.

SELECTED—I.

This first vision of Daniel is confessed on all hands to be an expansion of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's dream had represented human empire in its intelligent, well-proportioned might. It was man's power as formed, in some measure, in the image of God. The substance, the strength, the character of the several empires were different; the form was one. Daniel's vision exhibits them on another side. The four winds of heaven are driving upon the great sea, that representative, throughout Holy Scripture, of our troubled world, and out of it there arise forms of more than human strength. The terrific and wasting power of the world-empires is exhibited under the symbol of brute force. A sort of unity is given to them, in that they are all exhibited at first to the prophet's eye at once. God shows them to him first, as He Himself sees all things, at once; then, as they arose in fact, succeeding one another. Nor did they arise of their own power. "Not without being acted upon by the winds of heaven does the sea send forth those beasts; not without being set in motion by the powers above, does the heathen world form itself into those great empires."—(*Hoffman.*) As the Babylonian empire had been exhibited to Nebuchadnezzar under the symbol of the richest metal, *gold*, so now to Daniel under that of the solid strength of the king of beasts of prey, with the swiftness of the royal bird, the eagle. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had likened Nebuchadnezzar to both. The second beast, the bear corresponds with the solid, heavy, chest of Nebuchadnezzar's statue. The twofold division and the relative strength of the two sides recur in this symbol also. It lifts itself heavily, in contrast

with the winged rapidity of the Chaldean conquests. The *three ribs in its mouth* correspond accurately to the three kingdoms which the Medo-Persian empire swallowed up, the Lydian, Babylonian, and Egyptian. It is bidden, "*Arise, devour much flesh*," in conformity with the greedy character of the animal; waste of human life was a characteristic of the Persian empire in its heavy aggressiveness. Heaviness was, after Cyrus, the characteristic of its wars. Of the third empire, the characteristics are insatiableness of conquest, and swiftness, and fourfold division. The panther, an animal insatiable above every other beast of prey, gifted with a swiftness which scarce any prey can escape, is represented yet further with four wings. The subdivision of the empire is indicated by its four heads. Its colour corresponds to the brass of the image, its swiftness to the activity of the loins and thighs in the image. Probably the multiplication of the heads was a symbol of circumspection, of manifold, versatile intelligence. But, again, the chief object of interest in the vision is the fourth empire. For the living creature which can represent it there is no name. "In the former beasts," says Jerome, "there are single tokens of terribleness; in this, there are all." Of this last empire Daniel sees not only certain characteristics, but a history. Intervals of its history are marked. It embraces a long period. Its characteristic is stupendous strength. Permanent subdual characterized the Roman empire, but it had not the power of consolidating into one the disjointed materials of its greatness. The period after the destruction of the whole fourth kingdom is indicated by the words: *And the rest of the beasts*, the other kingdoms, *had their dominion taken away; yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time* (verse 12). This sentence seems to relate to a time after the destruction of the fourth empire, but this, being still future, we cannot explain certainly. The chief object of interest, that chiefly expanded, is, that in which all the kingdoms end—the kingdom of God victorious over the evil of the world. . . It is a sublime picture: man, with

his keen intellect, a look more stout than his fellows, overthrowing kings, doing his own will, speaking against God, placing himself over against Him as His antagonist, having, for a set time, all things in his hand; and above, out of sight, God enthroned in the serenity of His majesty, surrounded by the thousands of heavenly beings who serve Him; and near Him, One in human form, born of a human birth, yet, like God, above in the clouds of heaven, the darkness shrouding Him from human eye, but reigning and to reign for ever, His kingdom neither to *pass away* by decay, nor to be *destroyed* by violence. "God is patient, because He is eternal." Below, all is tumult; above, all is tranquility; the heavenly king over against the earthly potentate, until the last blasphemy draws down His lightnings upon him; the voice of his great word ascends, the judgment of God descends.—*Dr. Pusey.*

SELECTED—II.

ON THE FIRST TWO VISIONS OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

Two emblems are here used to describe the corruption of human states in past ages, the great image and the four beasts of prey. False religion and worldly ambition, with its natural fruits of cruelty and crime, are vividly portrayed by this twofold emblem. The redemption of man from this twofold fall must begin with their separate members. Let us, therefore, trace, from the emblems themselves, the bright and holy contrast which is waiting to be realized in the coming kingdom of God.

I.—Man, in his state of nature, is dead in trespasses and sins. In the symbols of the prophecy he is an atom of the dazzling, but lifeless image; a member incorporated in the wild beast of prey. The first work of redemption is to deliver him from this state. The bestial nature is then crucified and done away; and he becomes a living member of the body of Christ. He is no longer a lifeless atom of clay in the feet of the image. The breath of a new life has been breathed into

his nostrils; and, like Adam on the day of creation, he stands once more erect in the image of God. He is no longer a part of the great and dazzling image. The vain shows of superstition have lost their power. The emblem of the ravening beast ceases to describe him; he is transferred into a higher and holier fellowship. The fierce and bestial appetites are subdued; ambition, pride, and cruelty are driven from their seat in the heart, and mercy and kindness are enthroned in their room. The redeemed citizen thus reverses the second emblem of the visions. He no longer scatters fear and terror, like the heroes of Roman greatness, but becomes a fountain of social happiness.

II.—This prophecy leads us to contemplate the true character and blessedness of a righteous nation. This subject is, indeed, closely united with the former. Regenerate men are the living stones which alone are adapted for a structure so heavenly as a truly Christian kingdom. The duty of national religion is one of the plainest lessons here conveyed. The nations in their fallen condition are only toes of the image, or horns of a devouring beast. But this is an unnatural state from which the Gospel is designed to set them free. Two forms of national irreligion are here denounced; superstition, implied in the idol image, and ambitious selfishness or cruelty, prefigured in the emblem of the four beasts of prey. For both these grand evils only one remedy can be found, a hearty and national dedication to the fear, the worship, and the service of the living God. That this is a first duty, is a truth which appears conspicuous in the head of the golden image. The next duty of a righteous nation is provision for the needy. And when this has been attained, higher duties remain. A Christian ruler is bound to promote, by every means at his disposal, the spiritual welfare of the kingdom. Every Christian, and, most of all, every Christian statesman, should thus aim to raise the land of his birth from the worship of vain shadows, like the idol-image, and to turn it from the wasting course of cruel ambition. The closing part of these visions teaches us :—

1.—*The intense reality of God's providence here below.*

Every part of them forces upon us the deep conviction, that "there is a God that judgeth in the earth." But the same truth appears, with still more impressive lustre, from the promise of a future kingdom. Nothing can be unmeaning or without a purpose, in that world where Immanuel is hereafter to reign.

2.—*The true standard of national excellence and honour.*

The high standard of national dignity and holiness revealed here, is opposed to three great counterfeits and delusions, rife and prevalent in the present day. 1. Wealth and riches. When the image is broken, gold and silver is broken in pieces as well as iron and clay. In the coming kingdom of righteousness, upon all the gains of fraud and oppression will be found written "it is the price of blood." And the riches and wealth of happy nations shall be consecrated to the service of God. 2. Military ambition. This delusion shall also be done away. A nobler ambition shall one day animate the children of men. All shall then be warriors, but against pride, selfishness, and sin. 3. The cold and heartless theories of political ungodliness. When the great stone has smitten the image, it becomes a great mountain. It is not the dead level of a spiritual democracy, but ordinances of royalty and righteous dominion, which will then everywhere prevail.

III.—*The deep and surpassing interest of the Gospel narratives.*

A kingdom is to be established on the ransomed earth, in which the Son of Man will reign for ever. The King Himself has appeared, but only for a very little season, here below. An inspired record remains which reveals to us the thoughts, and words, and actions during His sojourn on earth, of this everlasting King. Viewed in this connection, what a fresh interest is thrown around these holy Gospels.—*T. R. Birks, M.A.*

THE FALL OF THE GREAT TREE.

"*I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: the leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven: he cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches; nevertheless leave the stumps of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field: and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.*"—Dan. iv. 10-15.

This parabolic vision is so similar to the parable of the great cedar in Ezek. xxxi. 3-17, that the teaching of the one is almost identical with that of the other. The circumstances of this vision, its occasion and its effects, may supply a few additional suggestions.

Notice—

I. Undue exaltation of spirit may bring degradation of the flesh.

Rich men often look over a vast domain which they call their own, and the sight of their outward and visible possessions may inflate their spirits with pride, as air forced into a bladder will expand it to its utmost extent. Yet much that they look upon may have been bought for them by the blood and brain and sweat of others, the thought of whose labour ought to prevent the vain-glory of the possessor. This was the case with this giant king of the olden times. He looked

upon his vast capital, with its beautiful buildings, its brazen gates, its luxuriant gardens and its massive walls, and the sight filled him with vain-glory and drew from him the boast, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (verse 30). And he bestowed no thought on the outstanding debt due to the human beings who had really built the city. If he had looked beyond that which was immediately before him, he would have seen the captives whom he had taken in war toiling to raise for him the stately buildings, those who had wrought for him, and had been repaid with scanty food and an iron rule. If he had thought of the weary bodies and broken hearts from many lands, who had fallen under the weight of the burdens laid upon them, he might have rejoiced with trembling. Above all, if he had considered the character of the God of Heaven as it had been revealed to him by Daniel, his tongue would have failed to utter the boast, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" But he "feared not God, neither regarded man." But God regarded the human creatures who had built the city; and His own honour; and the self-exaltation of the monarch's spirit must be brought down by the degradation of his flesh. "They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen."

II.—The degradation of the flesh may lead to a right exaltation of spirit.

"And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven and my understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation" (verse 34). There are many people whom prosperity fails to bring to a right state of heart before God, and then chastisement becomes a necessity. God is willing to try the rod when

nothing but the rod will bring the desired end. There are many men in the world who are much less overbearing towards the weak after they have been knocked down by a stronger arm than their own. The tyrants in a school who have been used to oppress their weaker schoofellows are often much improved by a severe beating by another more powerful than themselves. Nebuchadnezzar understood and gloried in physical power. The power of physical force was well known to a man who ruled over half the civilized world. And it was a great blessing to him when he was made to feel that there was *another King* who had rule in the world, and who could deal him such a blow as deprived him of his reason, and sunk him far below the level of his meanest slave. This was teaching he could fully appreciate, and an experience of the weight of God's arm led him to a right estimate of himself, and taught him to whom to ascribe his worldly greatness.

III.—A doxology will spring from a right exaltation of spirit.

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways are judgment" (ver. 37). Praise from a soul that has been humiliated in body and smitten in circumstance, is the best sign that it has come into a condition of sound humility, and that the affliction has not been in vain. Though Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen king, his description of praise to Jehovah is equal to that of any prophet of Israel. Those who have undergone a painful operation in order to recover their sight, often bless the kind and skilful hand by means of which they have been able to see, even although that hand has necessarily inflicted much pain. But praise is the outcome of pain when the pain has been followed by healing. So with Nebuchadnezzar. He passed through a painful experience, but it issued in bringing him to the feet of the Eternal God.

LESSONS.

I.—Divine punishment may become Divine healing. Dis-

eases require treatment in proportion to their severity, and of all soul-disease there is none more difficult to cure than pride, "which is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 5). But in the case before us, as in many others, the chastisement of the sin became the instrument of its cure.

II.—Those who have most sympathy with God are the most bold in declaring the conditions of His mercy. Daniel feared not to tell his king of his sins, and to warn him that repentance was the only way to escape judgment. Probably he had more of the Divine disposition than any other whose dwelling was with flesh at that time, and he certainly was in favour with the Court of Heaven. His character and position gave him the confidence which dared to reprove this haughty monarch, and to foretell what awaited him.

SELECTED.

The position of this tree, "in the midst of the earth," indicates its great importance for the whole earth, and its destiny to develope an unlimited growth in every direction. The tree thus occupies a central position that corresponds to its exceeding height. The symbolising of the mighty Babylonian king by a tree recalls the description by Ezekiel (xxi. 3), which was probably not known to Nebuchadnezzar, but with which Daniel, the narrator of his dream, must have been acquainted. The especial fondness of the ancient Orientals for the illustration of the growth or decline of human greatness and power by the figure of a growing or fallen tree, is shown by Hävernick in the parallels he adduces from Herodotus (iii. 19), the dream of Xerxes (vi. 37), etc. . . . . The "all flesh" of ver 12 refers not merely to the birds, but also to all the beasts of the field, and, in short, all the animals living on and under the tree, thus imaging all of the human race that were united under the sceptre of Nebuchadnezzar. . . . .

The figure of a tree is dropped in ver. 15; in the stead of a vegetable organism that necessarily clings to the ground, there

is presented, obviously with regard to the bestializing of Nebuchadnezzar, an animal organism, which, while naturally capable of unimpeded motion and of an individual and independent participation in life, is for the present forcibly restrained. There is thus a partial translation from the figure to the fact (as is frequently the case in the comparisons and allegories of our Lord, *e.g.*, Mark iv. 28, Luke xii. 46, Matt. xxii. 13, John x. 11; etc.), or at least an approximation of the figurative representation to the actual conditions of the event typified. The "fetters of iron and brass" symbolise the chains of darkness and coarse bestiality in which the mind of the king was held during an extended period.—*Lange's Commentary.*

ZECHARIAH'S VISION OF THE HORSES, ETC.

"*The word of the Lord came unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom,*" *etc.*—Zech. i. 7–11.

Notice—

I.—The name of this parabolic vision: "The word of the Lord."

Life is to us, and perhaps to all finite creatures, unseen; and being so, it must take a form in order to enable us to contemplate it. Thought is likewise invisible, and cannot be apprehended by us until it is clothed in some form. Unless this is the case, we cannot possibly know what another mind has to communicate to us. Thought, like life, must be clothed in a body in order to be known. And there are many forms which this body may take, all of which may be termed words. The dumb utter no intelligible sound, yet they express their thoughts by means of their fingers. The heavens have a *word* by which they teach us, although "there is no speech nor language,

their voice is not heard" (Psa. xix. 3, 4). God's greatest thought about men was revealed to us by His Son in human flesh. Christ was the Word of the Invisible God, the revelation of the Father's thought to the world. The symbols of this vision were the medium of the Divine thought; they were the dress or the body, by means of which God's thought was made known to the prophet.

II.—The time when the prophet received this "word of the Lord:" "in the night."

God has often chosen the night-season to reveal His mind to His servants. He made His covenant with Abraham in a night-vision, and "in the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men," Eliphaz declares that he received a message from the unseen world (Job iv. 12, 13). Jacob had his first vision of God in the night, and it was in the night that he saw God "face to face" at Peniel (Gen. xxxii. 24-30). At night men are more free from impressions from the outside world. The darkness and stillness of night throw the mind in upon itself. The spirit-world seems nearer than amidst the sights and sounds of daylight, and, therefore, the soul is more open to impressions of a spiritual nature. At such a time Zechariah received this vision of the Lord. We may conclude that it was not a dream, like that of Jacob at Bethel, but rather a kind of trance like that experienced by Peter at Joppa; in which the senses of the animal life are under entire subjection to the spirit, which, like a peaceful sea reflecting the starry heavens, becomes the reflector of the Divine revelation. The spirit, under these circumstances, is conscious and capable of reasoning. In such a condition the prophet received a series of parabolic visions, extending to the end of the sixth chapter of the book.

III.—The meaning of the symbolic word.

1. The *red* horses symbolise coming war. (See Rev. vi. 4.) The Hebrew Church was still in a state of tribulation. Although

the captivity was past, many difficulties and much opposition still surrounded it, the heathen nations who had been used as the instruments of its chastisement were enjoying rest and ease compared with it, but God was jealous for His people, and foretells by this symbol a period of coming judgment upon those who had oppressed them beyond measure.

2. *White* horses in Scripture symbolise victory (Rev. xix. 11). This colour is almost universally used to signify joy and triumph. The members of the Church triumphant are said to be clothed in *white robes* (Rev. vii. 9). The white horse and his rider indicate the final triumph of Israel over all her present trials.

3. The *speckled* horses set forth the *variety* of the Divine dealings. In God's providence, as in nature, we have not all red or terrible, nor all white or joyous and triumphant. There is the sunny and the dark side. There is the burning, bursting from the volcano and burying a city beneath it, and there is the cheering, life-giving heat of the summer sun beaming upon the evil and the good, and making the earth to rejoice and bring forth fruit. So in the dispensations of God's providence. It is needful for the training of human souls that they should sometimes experience the "sorrows of death and the pains of hell," as well as the gladness of heart which expresses itself in thanksgiving and the voice of melody. The speckled horses are expressive of the various dealings of God with Israel, of that mingling of mercy and judgment which had been intended to lift them up to a high level among the nations of the world.

Lessons.

I.—The Church triumphant is intended to minister to the comfort of the Church militant. Those who are strongest in the Church of God on earth find it pleasant and profitable to minister to its weaker members, and it gives hope and courage to such to feel that they are cared for by those who are great in the Church below. "Good and comfortable words" cheer the downcast and troubled soul when they are only the words

of a sinful man. In this vision we are taught that sinless beings find a like holy pleasure and profit in speaking words of comfort to their brethren on the earth. *How* they minister we do not know, but we are assured that they do (Heb. i. 14).

II.—The child of light walking in darkness is under the guidance of the angels of light. The prophet Elijah was once perplexed by the apparent darkness of God's providential dealings, and gave up all for lost. In this state of mind an angel of God visited him, and spoke comfortable words of cheer. Here Zechariah is in a similar condition of mind, and is visited by a similar comforter.

III.—God's silence *at* sin is not God's forgiveness *of* sin. A father's forbearance with his child may be misconstrued into an indifference to the sin. The argument is, that because he *has* not punished, therefore he *will* not. But this is not always a safe method of reasoning in relation to men, and is never so in relation to God. The magistrate's remand of a prisoner is not a discharge. The delay of an execution is not a pardon. That God does not at once visit the transgression of men who do not seek His pardon is no proof that He will not. The Heathen were "at ease," but God was "sore displeased" with them notwithstanding (verse 15. See Psalm l.).

SELECTED—I.

I understand that all these horses had riders. There were, then, a troop of horsemen; but the prophet says that one appeared as the chief leader, who was accompanied by others. These horsemen had returned from an expedition; for they had been sent to review the whole world and its different parts. He therefore says that they had returned from their journey, and also that the whole earth was quiet, that men enjoyed peace and tranquility everywhere. It seemed a very unbecoming and strange thing that the faithful alone should be oppressed with adversities, while others lived in peace and enjoyed their pleasures. There follows at length an answer

from God. I regard this as the object—that horsemen were presented to the prophet that he might know that God does not remain shut up in heaven, and neglect the affairs of men, but that He has, as it were, swift horses, so that He knows what things are everywhere carried on. The prophet here ascribes to God the character of a chief sovereign, who enquires respecting all the affairs of men. It is, indeed, certain that all things were fully known to Him before He created angels, but God assumes the character of man in order that He may more familiarly instruct us. . . . As God did not intend to exhibit in full light what He afterwards in due time taught, the vision appeared in the night. And to the same purpose is what he says respecting the angels, that they were in a *dark or deep place*, and that they were among the myrtles. Some think that their being in a deep place and thick shade designates the state of the people, being that of sorrow and of joy; for though quietness in part was restored to the people, yet much darkness and much perplexity remained in their affairs. There was one angel more eminent than the rest, and in this there is nothing unusual, for when God sends forth a company of angels, He gives the lead to some one. If we regard this angel as Christ, the idea is consistent with the common usage of Scripture, for Christ, we know, is the head of the angels. With regard to the different colours, the prophet, no doubt, understood that they designated the offices allotted to angels, as some convey God's benefits, and others come armed with scourges and swords. The design of the vision is not doubtful; it is, that the Jews might be assured that the distresses which they at present endured would not be perpetual, that there was a hope of the temple and the city being rebuilt, because God had returned into favour with the people. The prophet teaches at the same time that the building of the temple was not to be expected, but as an instance of God's gratuitous favour, and this doctrine ought also to be extended to the state of the Church at all times, for whence comes it that the Church remains safe in the world except that

God indulges us according to His infinite goodness?—*Calvin.*

SELECTED—II.

By the myrtle grove is meant the Church of God; by the bottom, Babylon: by the captain, Jesus Christ; by the red horse, His design of war against Babylon; by the speckled horses, His various providences; by the white horses, the Church triumphant in the end.

There be three heads from which the streams of the observations may flow.

1. *The time and place.* The time was night, a dark and obscure season. The place was a deep bottom, or valley, and both are fit emblems of the troubles and afflictions of the Church. Yet here Christ, her Lord, was present with her. Though the state of the Church be dark, the vision is bright; God's work goes on, though it be by night. Though the Church might not, as yet, see the prophet, yet she enjoys her Captain, and though his help be invisible, yet it is certain. The Church shall be both fruitful and fragrant in the midst of couchant valleys, at the foot of the proud and lofty mountains of the world.

2. *The Myrtle Grove.* The Church of God in her lowest time is His garden, His Paradise. He planted it, He beholds and walks in it, He waters and watches it. The Church is likened to a myrtle grove, to note the *humility* of its members. Then the myrtle is *ever green.* Though low, yet always verdant, like that godly man whose leaf never withers. The storm of persecution may break their boughs, but not destroy their greenness. And the myrtle is eminent for fragrancy. So the thoughts and discourses of saints breathe holiness in every air. The vision exhibits these trees in a grove to show communion. Saints love society, so it be the society of saints.

3. *The Captain and His forces.* Christ doth frequently appear to His Church under a warlike posture. He is Head of angels for the protection of His myrtle garden. He fights

not for war, but for peace. He is a Captain, successful and victorious, and leads those legions into the field who love the Church, and delight to minister to her. Let not the Church be troubled, if sometimes the speckled horses appear, though various administrations interweave her comfort. April will pass, and a durable summer will follow; what begins with red goes on to speckled, and ends in white. The deepest place in the valley is next to the foot of the mountain for ascent.—*Samuel Lee, D.D.*

ZECHARIAH'S VISION OF THE FOUR HORNS.

"*Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the Lord shewed me four carpenters. Then said I, What come these to do? And he spake, saying, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head; but these are come to fray them, to cast out the horns of the Gentiles, which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it.*"—Zech. i. 18-21.

There are two interpretations as to the reference of the four horns. Some commentators consider that the four horns represent the four kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, while others look upon them as types of the whole of the enemies of Israel coming from the four quarters of the earth. Looked at in either way, they teach the same general truths.

I.—That while the world-powers continue and the Church of God lives in their midst, the latter will be subjected to opposition and persecution.

Wherever and whenever the evil power is predominant, the good has a struggle for existence. This is the case both

in relation to man against man, or to tendencies against tendencies, and is as old as the existence of sin in the world. There is in every man a conscience which gives him light, but whenever sin rules in the human spirit we find the light of conscience is well-nigh put out. And even in the renewed man, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit," and it was only by the help of the Lord Christ that Paul himself held his ground (see Rom. vii). The kingdom of God within us is oppressed whenever the unrenewed tendencies gain a pre-eminence, and the battle within is but a type of the battle without. The first son of the human race hated the second, and slew him "because his own work was evil and his brother's righteous." And this principle has been at work ever since, often in the many against the few. The Church below has ever been, from necessity, the Church *militant*.

II.—That whatever number of foes the Church may have, God will take care to provide her with an equal number of friends.

There were four horns directed against Judah, but there were four carpenters to destroy them. God recognises the fact that the enemies of His church are many and mighty, but He proclaims that He holds in His hand as mighty and as many friends. "Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn (Isa. liv. 16, 17).

III.—That though there will ever be conflict between God's Church and her enemies, there will never be a defeat but on one side.

The strongest force must ultimately gain the day. Goodness is in itself stronger than evil, and the human will, trained by the truth of God and under the guidance and

strengthening influences of the Divine Spirit, has again and again proved itself invincible when attacked by the forces of evil. For illustrations of this truth, we have but to consult the records of the triumph of those who have been sustained by faith in Christ under the cruel persecutions of Pagan and Papal Rome. We can account for the existence of the Church only from the fact that "God is in the midst of her."

SELECTED—I.

Who are these smiths or carpenters? They are also horns; for they all wish to destroy, as much as they can, the Church; but God does not permit them; on the contrary, He excites them to mutual wars to destroy one another. Though, then, all these are horns ready to assault the Church, and though it appears evident from the comparison that they are, as it were, furious and vicious bulls, and, as much as they can, unite together to scatter the Church, yet God gives hammers to two or three of them, and bids them to check the ferocity of their associates. While all these are intent on striking and dispersing the Church with their horns, the Lord calls them to a different work, and, as I have said, bids them to be smiths that they may strike and break in pieces these horns, even their associates, with whom they had previously wickedly conspired. And it is certainly a wonderful instance of God's providence, that amidst so violent and turbulent commotions the Church should take breath, though under the cross; for except these hammers had broken the horns, we had been dashed into fragments. But God has turned aside their strokes by His hammers, and has employed His enemies for this purpose.—*Calvin.*

SELECTED—II.

This vision is—

I.—For *Instruction.* The progress of the wicked in their enmity against the Church, is but the prologue to the Church's deliverance. First, the horns arise and play their part; and this brings on the hammer-men to act their part.

II.—For *Admonition:* that God's people be not offended, or dismayed, when they see things go contrary to their deliverance. At such times let us calm ourselves, (1) With a consideration of the just aggravation of our own sins, our disunion and security that opened the door to let in the misery. (2) With the consideration of the character of the horns. It is the nature of a beast to do as they do, to push and scatter. A brute will be a brute. A devil will be a devil. But beasts are not made to rule over men. And the devil is the gaoler of the wicked, not our ruler. (3) As the constitution, so the complexion of the last times is indeed the worst; so no better is to be expected for a time, but, though the several hammers make at first but a confused noise, and the pieces of the building lie in the dust, yet, ere long, the new building is reared, and the Great Master of the house comes in and dwells among us in it.

III.—For *Exhortation.* (1) Let us not judge by sense, but by faith. (2) Judge not by present action, but by their productive tendency. (3) Judge not by the meanness of means, but by the might of the hand that useth them.—*N. Homes.*

THE VISION OF JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST.

"*And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan, standing at his right hand to resist him,*" *etc., etc.*—Zech. chap iii.

The object of this vision was to encourage the Jews, who were now settled again in their own land, at once to begin to re-build the temple of the Lord. They seem to have cherished the idea that they ought not to set about this work until seventy years had expired from the day upon which the temple was destroyed. Many commentators consider that it was this conviction which led them to settle down in their own homes and

to say "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Haggai i. 2). Both Haggai and Zechariah were charged by Jehovah to correct this mistake, and this parabolic vision has this for its object.

Consider,—

I.—The representative characters of the high-priest and of Satan.

The man who appears before human dignities on behalf of others assumes, by his position, a representative character. His importance depends upon the number and the kind of persons whom he represents. Moreover, those who undertake to represent others are an embodiment of the principles and opinions which govern those whom they represent. By their position they declare that they have sympathy with them. So it is with the persons in this vision. Joshua is a representative of the Hebrew nation, especially of the godly people in it; his filthy garments were emblematic of the moral defilement of the nation, and of their low and poor condition. "They had been in the glowing furnace of Chaldean bondage and exile, and the smell of fire was still on their garments." Satan is the representative of all evil forces. He represents the majority of this world, but the minority of the universe.

II.—The motives which at this time brought them into God's presence.

It is implied that the high-priest was there to plead for his nation. The assurance "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee" (verse 4), and the symbol of the change of raiment, are a double answer to a prayer for forgiveness, and show us that Joshua was there to intercede for himself and for his people. Satan was there to oppose this restoration to God's favour,—to bring forward reasons why it should not be granted, thus setting forth the fitness of the name given to him in Rev. xii. 10, "the accuser of our brethren."

III.—The reason given why the promise and the symbol

should have their perfect fulfilment. "I will bring forth my servant the Branch," etc. (verses. 8, 9.)

One life, or one act in a life, is sometimes of such a nature or character as to send down a blessing to future ages; it seems to gather within itself all the wisdom or all the goodness of the past, and to bring them all into a centre of blessing for the present and the future. A legislator may bless generations to come by the introduction of some wise and beneficial law; a patriot may earn the gratitude of posterity by some act which delivers his nation from bondage. The life of God's Son, and especially His death upon the cross, gathered up all that had been shadowed forth in the prophets and priests of old. His perfect life, and sinless death, and intercession, were sureties that the promise given to the Hebrew people, through Joshua, should certainly be fulfilled. In this prophecy, as in many others, the lowly origin of this "Great High Priest" is set forth under the symbol of a "Branch" (Isa. xi. 1; Jer. xxiii. 5; Ezek. xviii. 22), and the similitude then changes, and the fulness of wisdom and knowledge, which were to dwell in this "Hope of Israel," is set forth in the "stone engraven with seven eyes." And the result of the life and work of this greatest of God's servants is to be peace on earth. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree." (ver. 10). The vision thus embodies the blessed results of Divine forgiveness through the life and death of Christ, which are so beautifully set forth by the greatest of Old Testament prophets in Isa. xi and xii.

Lessons.

I.—Evil spirits plead with God *against* men as the good plead *for* them. Many *human* beings send up desires against the prosperity and happiness of their fellow-men. We need not descend into the unseen world of evil spirits in order to find examples of such prayers. What marvel is it, then, that we here find Satan praying against men, and desiring God not to

grant the petition of a godly soul? We know that these Satanic prayers are not answered as a rule, yet there have been exceptions. In the gospel history, we have an example of the devils presenting a petition to Christ (Matt. viii. 31), and although this was not a prayer against men's souls, it was one which led to the destruction of their property, and is a good example of the nature of the beings who uttered it. It was granted as a chastisement to human sinners. The Satanic challenge to God concerning Job (ch. i. 9) was a prayer against him, and was granted to a certain extent, but only to increase the honour of the good man, and to deepen the hell of malicious envy in the bosom of the petitioner. Such petitions ever bring the Lord's rebuke (ver. 2), and are returned with compound interest upon those who offer them.

II.—The man who would be a benefactor of his fellow-creatures must be an intercessor for them. So Abraham would have blessed the Sodomites, had it been possible for them to be spared; so Moses again and again averted the judgment of God from his guilty nation. Our Lord and Saviour is "able to save them to the uttermost (or *evermore*) who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25).

III.—The elect of God are those who fulfil the conditions of fellowship with God. Divine forgiveness springs from Divine grace, but the proof that it has reached us must be found in the fact that we fulfil the only conditions upon which it is granted. "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, ... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 7, 9).

SELECTED—I.

We have—

I.—Joshua's ministry and defence.

He stood. 1. To *minister* before the Lord. Whereby we learn (1) that as ministers of the Lord have their mission from Him, so they ought to receive instruction from Him. (2) Having received instructions, they ought with all readiness to obey them. (3) That they are always in the eye of God, to counsel then in their duties, to search them in their performances, to hear them in their petitions, to protect them in their dangers. 2. He stood as a *defendant*, as one accused, to answer for himself and others. The sins of the age were then general. (1) Neglect of building the temple (Haggai i. 2). (2) Marrying strange wives (Ezra ix. 1, 2; x. 13). Yet Satan bringeth his accusation against the priest only. His plot was against Israel; but his practice was upon David, to number the people. If he can overthrow public persons, and cast down a Joshua, the rest he hopes to have presently in his power. Cut the tree up by the roots, and then you may easily lop off all the branches. Next to this, that they stand before the Lord and have His eye upon them, there can hardly be a more profitable consideration for men in office, than to remember that Satan is at their right hand, to tempt, to accuse, to observe, and to resist them. The nearer we know that Satan is to us, the more pure and holy should our lives be.

II.—Satan, and his work against Joshua.

1. He withstands us *as a tempter*. If we do our duty, Satan is at our right hand to hinder us; if we do not our duty, he is there to accuse us. No sooner was Christ called to His work but Satan presents himself to tempt Him. He stands at the working hand. Usually, the more work the more temptation; and the more public the work, the more sharp and eager the temptation. None more exposed to Satan's opposition than a Zerubbabel and a Joshua—a conscionable magistrate and a zealous minister. Their office is most against his kingdom, and therefore his malice is most against their function. 2. He opposeth *as an accuser*. As the young man said to Joab, "If I should have done as thou sayest, thou thyself wouldst

have set thyself against me" (2 Sam. xviii. 13), is most true of Satan; if he can tempt us into sin, he will be the first to accuse us of it. We know that Satan resisted Joshua by stirring up the Samaritans to hinder the building of the temple (Ezra iv. 5, 6, 23). Satan, as the chief captain, uses wicked men as his drudges and instruments in all his oppositions against the Church. But he also resisted him in his ministry by accusing him of his failings. What these failings were we may guess. (1) He ministered not in the priest's robes, but in filthy garments. (2) He delayed the building of the temple (Ezra v. 1). (3) His sons were, some of them, defiled with strange wives (Ezra x. 18). What a white devil have we here! Satan zealous for God's worship, which is the thing that he chiefly maligneth.

III.—The advocate. The Lord.

When Satan is the Church's accuser, Christ is the Church's advocate. Satan is at our right hand, but Christ is at God's right hand. When Satan here accuseth, Joshua does not plead his own cause; but he answers by his counsel, his advocate pleads for him. Satan is to be overcome, not by human counsel or power, but by the intercession of Christ.

IV.—The double foundation of this victory.

1. God's gracious election. "The Lord which hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee." The doctrine of adoption by free grace is the strongest weapon that we can wield against the malice of Satan. 2. Joshua's past deliverance, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Past mercies are pledges of more. If God snatch out of the fire, He will bring unto His temple; if he lay a foundation, He will bring forth the headstone. He who will not have us weary in well-doing, will not be weary in well doing Himself.—*Bishop Reynolds.*

SELECTED—II.

This vision was given to the prophet for two reasons—that the faithful might know that their contest was with Satan rather

than with any particular nations—and also that they might understand that a remedy was at hand, for God stood in defence of the priesthood which He had instituted. First, God proposed to remind the faithful that they had to carry on war, not with flesh and blood, but with the devil himself; and then His design was to recall them to Himself, that they might consider that He would be their sure deliverer from all dangers. And this knowledge is as useful to us as it was to the Jews. We should not wonder why so many enemies rage against us if we bore in mind that we are fighting with the devil, the head and prince of the whole world. That typical priesthood was a representation of the priesthood of Christ, and Joshua, who was then returned from exile, bore the character of Christ the Son of God. Let us know that Christ never performs the work of His priesthood, but that Satan stands by His side, that is, devises all means by which he may remove and withdraw Christ from His office. It hence follows, that they are much deceived who think that they can live idly under the dominion of Christ; for we all have a warfare, for which each is to arm and equip himself . . . . . The rebuke of God is not to be regarded as being only in words, but must be referred to that power by which God subverts and lays prostrate all the attempts of Satan. At the same time He mentions the end for which this rebuke was given, viz., that the Church might continue safe and secure . . . . He adds "*Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*" that the faithful might be convinced that God would not forsake His own work; for the end ever corresponds with the beginning as to God's favour; He is never wearied in the middle course of His beneficence. "Why," says God "Thou thinkest it possible to abolish the priesthood, which has been preserved hitherto? See whence this priest has come forth. While he was in Chaldea, he seemed to be in the lower regions; yet God delivered him from thence; and now when he sits in the temple performing His office, is it possible for thee to pull down from heaven Him whom thou couldest not detain in hell"? . . . . By the

new garments given to Joshua, the prophet means that, though the priesthood had been for a time contemptible, it would yet recover whatever dignity it had lost. . . . The people, as well as the priests, had denuded themselves of all glory by their iniquities, but they were still to retain hope, for the remedy was in God's power, who would at length change the reproach and dishonour of the high-priest into very great glory, even when the time of gratuitous remission or of good pleasure arrived.—*Calvin.*

THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK, ETC.

"*Behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof; and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.*"—Zech. iv. 2, 3

The teaching of this vision carries us a step beyond the one in the preceding chapter. That parable sets forth the need and ground of forgiveness, the present one teaches us generally that forgiveness cannot be made effectual unless it is followed by constant supplies of the Spirit of God. Looking at its various details, we learn—

I.—That the Church of God is composed of the most precious human material in the world.

Gold has always been regarded as the most precious metal. Other metals are valuable, but this one holds the first place. So the value of some men to society is manifestly greater than that of others. Men of physical strength have a certain worth in the world, but mere strength of body is not worth so much now as it was in the days of Tubalcain. The man who is intellectually strong is now more valued. The power of intellect is greater than that of muscle, it places a man in a higher

sphere of usefulness. But the man who walks day by day with the "King Eternal, Immortal and Invisible" is of far more value to the world, and is regarded by God as of more worth than the man of the greatest intellectual attainments. The candlestick of the vision, which represents the Church, was of gold to indicate this truth.

II.—That the Church of God is a light-giver because its power to give light is sustained from a source outside itself.

The tree has life within itself, but that life cannot be sustained, and consequently it cannot give to us gifts of beauty and usefulness, unless it receives sustenance from without. So the life of the Church of God is not self-sustaining. God is the sustaining power by which the Church is kept alive, and only as she is supplied from Him with the holy oil of the Divine Spirit, can she give out that light which is the life of men. The most perfect machinery without this life-sustaining force is useless to accomplish the Divine purpose of making the Church a blessing to the world. Human hands and brains can produce most perfect human forms in wax, and wood, and stone, but it is a secret unknown to men how to breathe into a lifeless form the breath of life. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us, all the wisdom of the wise and the understanding of the prudent come here to a full stop. Here Nature conceals more than she reveals even to those who challenge her most. This mysterious living principle is due to a Life at the back of all that is apprehended by the senses, a Life which some call *the efficient cause*, but which we think it more reasonable to call the *Living God*. And what is true of the life of the body, is equally true of the moral life. All outward forms and observances are but so much dead clay unless the Living Spirit of God is in them. We see the evidence of the life, but who can understand the secret working of the Holy Ghost upon the human soul? The mysteriousness of His operation is beyond our comprehension, but so is that of the working of the human spirit upon the human body. Can we explain how

a man's spirit operates upon his eyes to open them, or upon his feet to cause him to walk? Then let us not deny the reality of the Holy Spirit's influence upon the soul because we cannot explain it.

III.—That, because of this All-sufficient Source of Life, we are assured that small beginnings in the kingdom of God will issue in great results.

The law of the Gospel kingdom is here the same as that of the kingdom of nature, which is the kingdom of God also. There is no such thing in nature as instantaneous result. The blade comes before the ear. A handful of corn thrown into the ground may one day become sufficient to feed millions, but this will be a work of time. The husbandman who would cease to sow because the seed did not at once spring up would be looked upon as a madman. The law of the spiritual kingdom is to begin with the small and end with the great. In its early development the hope of all the ages was in a childless man and woman, and they as "good as dead" (Heb. xi. 12). Yet from them came a nation as numerous as the stars of heaven, and the "Desire of all nations" (Hag. ii. 7), the Everlasting Son. The man to whom the words, "*Who hath despised the day of small things*," were addressed, was himself an evidence of growth from weak beginnings, for he was once only a feeble infant. But connection with the source of life ensures growth unto perfection.

SELECTED—I.

I.—The Church is a golden light-bearer, and therefore at once precious and luminous. Zion is God's peculiar inheritance, its members are His jewels, acquired by an immeasurable ransom and therefore properly symbolised by an article made of solid gold. One of the chief functions of the Church has ever been to give light. All the true light enjoyed by the ancient world streamed out from the candlestick which God set up in His chosen people, and still more largely was this the

case in the new economy. It was intended to be diffusive and propagandist, but only by the force of light, the manifestation of the truth.

II.—But the Church, like the moon, shines only with a borrowed light. She has no resources of her own. All depends upon the central Sun of Righteousness, not only for illumination, but for every other kind or degree of influence. God uses human instruments, and rarely, if ever, works independently of them, but when they effect their aim, the power comes from above. A sailing vessel, perfectly appointed and manned, cannot move in a calm. The apostles were held fast in Jerusalem until the Spirit was poured out from on high. Then, and not till then, the work went on. Whether in the conversion of the individual or in mighty movements among races and nations, the effect is due to a supernatural cause. In the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, so long as this truth was recognised, the work went on; but when an arm of flesh was introduced, and reliance placed upon a worldly policy, a retrograde movement set in.

III.—The effusion of the Holy Ghost is not an arbitrary thing. The lamps give light because the tubes convey oil from a central reservoir. But how is this kept full? By living trees whose supply is perpetually renewed. These living trees are the kingship and priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. By His sacrifice He procured the measureless grace of the Holy Ghost, and by His enthronement at the Father's right hand He has power to shed down the life-giving influence in mighty streams. The oil of grace cannot fail, just because the Lord Jesus is an eternal Priest and an eternal King.—*Lange's Commentary.*

SELECTED—II.

Light in general is the emblem of excellence. A lamp is an instrument formed to yield an artificial light, which, being sustained by oil, is really nothing but oil kindled into flame.

When a lamp is taken for the emblem of spiritual and intellectual excellency, truth must be its oil, the pabulum of its light, which in reality is nothing else but truth displayed, showing itself to the world. The oil which is the food of this symbolical lamp is religious and saving truth—truth concerning God and man, which, when received and retained internally, enlightens men. It is the property of light to diffuse itself upon all objects within its reach. And he who hath in himself this spiritual light, gives light to the world. Hence the propriety of the symbol of a candlestick to represent the Church of God. . . . . As the olive-tree is the producer of oil, so the dispensations of God in the scriptures, in the old and new testaments, are the only sources whence Divine truth is derived to men in perfect purity. Hence it appears, that the olive-trees are fit symbols of the dispensations of the law and the gospel. The olive-trees give out their oil by two branches, which are of course intended to represent some eminent instruments for the propagation of true religion. These are the ministers of the law and the gospel, or I should rather say, of the Christian religion, considered as two distinct bodies of men . . . . . For the Christian ministry fulfils the office of the Jewish priesthood, administering the the old dispensation to its true and best intent and purpose.—*Dr. Stonard.*

SELECTED—III.

The two sons of oil can only be the two media, anointed with oil, through whom the spiritual and gracious gifts of God were conveyed to the Church of the Lord, namely, the existing representatives of the priesthood, and the regal government, who were at that time Joshua and Zerubbabel. . . . The vision was not intended to represent entirely a new order of things, but simply to show the completion of that which was already contained and typified in the old covenant. The seven-armed candlestick was nothing new in itself. All that was new was the apparatus by which it was supplied with oil.

. . . The meaning was that the Lord would in future bestow upon His congregation the organs of His Spirit, and maintain them in such direct connection with it, that it would be able to let its light shine with sevenfold brilliancy.—*Keil.*

THE FLYING ROLL.

"Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold, a flying roll," etc.—Zech. v. 1-4.

We now come to a marked change in the visions of Zechariah, a change as great as that from sunshine to storm on an April day. The visions before this one are all calculated to inspire joy and hope. But from the sweet assurance of forgiveness and Divine help, given in the third and fourth chapters, we are now brought face to face with judgment, sharp and terrible, where no ray of light illuminates the darkness. As there is in nature the beautiful and the terrible, and both aspects are included in the government of the same God, so his moral government includes not only "the riches of His goodness and forbearance, and long-suffering," but also "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" (Rom. ii. 4-9), according to the characters of those who are to be dealt with.

Notice that we are taught,—

I.—That the man who is marked as a special transgressor is marked also for special judgment.

The curse went "forth over the face of the whole earth," but it was to cut off the thief and the false swearer. The storm-cloud that hangs over the forest holds within it a preordained lightning to smite certain trees that, by their position, will be marks for the fiery fluid. There is a law by which the one is taken, and the other left. The feller of trees selects those that are fittest, and marks them upon which he will place his axe. In the Hebrew nation there were many sinners, but

there, as everywhere else, there were sinners who had not yet filled up the measure of their iniquity, and there were others who had passed all bounds, whose transgressions were so great as to make them marks upon which the lightnings of God's displeasure must fall.

II.—That escape from the consequences of unrepented sin is impossible.

"It shall enter into the house of the thief, and of him that sweareth falsely by my name; and it shall remain in the midst of his house and shall consume it with the timbers thereof and the stones thereof." It is not necessary that the sin should reveal itself in action to ensure the entail of the certain penalty. If it never passes the boundary of the inner man, there will be a reaction upon the man's spirit as certainly as night follows day, and more so, because God has suspended the laws of nature, but we have no reason to suppose He has ever interposed to prevent the consequences of sin, unless the sinner has come under the power of another law—the law of forgiveness by confession and repentance. However hidden the transgression, the curse will find out its most secret hiding-place. The fool who has said in his *heart*, "No God," will be found out, although the thought has never passed his lips; and the man of impure thoughts will experience the bitter reaction of such thinking, although it has never become a deed. It may come silently, without speech or language, its voice may not be heard, but come it will. And if it will come when a man's sin is, as it were, confined within the walls of his own being, how much more will he find it impossible to escape from it when it is revealed in open words and deeds.

III.—That theft and perjury include all other sins.

The son who forges his father's name includes in that one act every other crime that he can commit against him except that of taking his life. He only needs occasion to reveal his readiness for any other act of dishonour toward his parent. The man

who deliberately appeals to God to uphold him in his false statements, forges the name of the Eternal Himself, and seeks to turn the God of truth into the Father of lies. Such an act must include all other sins against the Divine Being; there is surely nothing too profane for such a heart to conceive, and such a tongue to utter. As the seed of a poisonous herb only needs favourable conditions to develope into the full-grown plant, so the perjurer only needs opportunity and sufficient motive to become a breaker of the whole of the first table of the law. And so theft includes within itself the violation of the whole of the second table. Covetousness is the bud of which theft is the blossom. If the house is on fire we need not enquire if there was first a spark. The effect proclaims the cause. And if he who hates his brother is a murderer, he who robs his brother is a murderer also. Therefore one side of this roll denounced the false swearer, because his sin included all others against God, and the other side bore a curse upon the thief, because his sin contained within it all other sins against his fellow-man.

IV.—That the special sins of some bring suffering upon many.

The curse went forth "over the whole earth" (or land). It is a truth proclaimed by God and verified by experience, that many may suffer by the sin of the few to whom they are in some way related. The curse upon the sin of a father finds its way into the hearts and homes of his children, the sin of a part of a nation brings a blight upon the whole people as in the case before us. This principle and its bright reverse are fully wrought out by Paul in Romans v. 18.: "Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

THE WOMAN IN THE EPHAH.

"*Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth? And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an ephah that goeth forth,*" *etc.*—Zech. v. 5-11.

The question of the angel, and the answer of the prophet, suggest: 1. That the medium of Divine thought may be obscure to human understanding. A seaman looking into the distance may not be able to discern whether the object passing before his glass is a cloud or a substantial reality, but this is not because of any defect in the object itself, but because of the weakness of the mariner's vision. The prophet looked at that to which the angel invited his attention, but he had only an indistinct conception of what was before him. 2. That which we are to communicate to others, must be seen clearly by ourselves. The angel could see the object distinctly, but as the prophet had to write the vision he must see it for himself. 3. That what is difficult of apprehension to one servant of God is very easy to another. The difference, in this respect, in one family is sometimes very remarkable; what is easily apprehended by one child is utterly unintelligible to another. The angel could see at a glance what the prophet could not, therefore Zechariah must go to school to him to be instructed. There are two main interpretations of this vision; Henderson considers that it sets forth the entire removal of idolatry from the land of the Hebrews, and that the two females represent the Assyrian and Babylonian powers, which were God's instruments of removal. But idolatry had been removed from the land before the time of Zechariah, and we shall therefore take the other view, viz., that it refers to the general sin of the nation, which reached its height in the rejection of the Messiah, after which the nation was entirely removed from the land. "And so they remain, shut up in the ephah, the tremendous

weight of their own obstinacy, forbidding the prospect of release."—*Lange's Commentary.*

It suggests,—

I.—That time is needed for a nation to complete its destruction as well as for its construction.

The ephah is a measure of considerable size ; the idea conveyed is that, when it is full, it is lifted up and carried away. The filling takes time, and the nation to which the vision pointed did not all at once fill up the full measure of its iniquity. It was more than 500 years later when the Roman eagles fluttered over the city, and the entire dispersion of the nation took place. The same truth is taught in other parts of Scripture. When God promised Canaan to the children of Abraham, He gave as one reason for the delay of their inheritance, that "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. xv. 16. See also Dan. viii. 23; Matt. xxiii. 32 ; 1 Thess. ii. 16). God delays to punish because "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9). Wickedness is allowed to go on unchecked for a certain period but only to give space for repentance. "Let it alone this year," says the dresser of the vineyard, "and if it bear fruit, well ; and if not, then after that, *thou shalt cut it down*" (Luke xiii. 8, 9).

II.—That sin first imprisons the sinner, and then separates him from the Divine presence.

A talent of lead shuts the woman into the ephah, which is then borne into the land of Shinar. This foretells the constant dwelling of the Jews among the Gentile nations. They had been twice before this in bondage to the Gentiles, their last captivity had been in Shinar, or Babylon, from which they had but lately been delivered, but the building of a house in the land indicates that their next subjection to the Gentiles ; would be comparatively a permanent one. But this banishment and bondage was the consequence of a wilful subjection to sin.

The man who finds himself in a condemned-cell feels that he is, in a sense, buried alive and banished from the society of his fellow-creatures. But he is shut in and banished from his own choice. He first buried himself in sin and filled up the measure until he brought himself under the condemnation of the law. So it was with the Jewish nation, and so it is with every man who rejects God's plan of regenerating Him. He is self-imprisoned and self-banished.

III.—That those who reject God's plan of restoration will be left to their own.

God offered to the Jewish nation a sure foundation upon which to rebuild their national greatness (see Isa. xxviii. 16). This they would not accept. Therefore they were banished from their land, and, in the words of this prophecy, "set there upon their own base." They were left to be their own national architects and defenders, and the history of their bitter sufferings for many centuries, and their present inability to gather themselves into a national whole shows how ill they succeed who prefer their own way to that which God offers to them. This truth applies equally to every man who rejects the only foundation upon which his character can be rebuilt into its original greatness.

SELECTED—I.

The figures of the flying roll and the woman in the ephah are so closely connected that they are to be taken as *one* vision. The first prepares the way for what is carried out in the second. . . . . The fact that the writing which brings the curse has the same dimensions as the tabernacle, signifies that the measure by which this curse upon sinners will be meted out, will be the measure of the holy place. Sinners would be cut off from the congregation of the Lord, which appeared before God in the holy place . . . . . The vision certainly refers to the remote future of the kingdom of God, and therefore "the whole land" reaches as far as the spiritual Israel or Church of Christ is spread over the earth. . . . . Thieves

are mentioned for the sake of individualizing, as sinners, against the second table of the decalogue; false swearers, as sinners against the first table. . . . In the vision of the ephah, the woman is wickedness embodied; this name is given to Jezebel in 2 Chron. xxiv. 7. . . . The name *Shinar* is not to be taken geographically as referring to Mesopotamia, but is a notional or real definition which affirms that the ungodliness carried away out of the sphere of the people of God will have its permanent settlement in the sphere of the imperial power that is hostile to God. The double vision of this chapter, therefore, shows the separation of the wicked from the congregation of the Lord, and their banishment into, and concentration within, the ungodly kingdom of the world. This distinction and separation commenced with the coming of the Messiah, and runs through all the ages of the spread and development of the Christian Church, until at the time of the end they will come more and more into outward manifestation, and the evil, having been sifted out by the judicial power of God and His Spirit, will form itself into a Babel of the last days, as Ezek. xxxviii. and xxxix. clearly show, and attempt a last struggle with the kingdom of God, in which it will be overcome and destroyed by the last judgment.—*Keil.*

SELECTED—II.

The sense of this vision is: As the Israelites have filled up the measure of their sins, so shall also the full measure of the Divine punishment overtake them. As a symbol of this thought, the ephah, one of the largest measures, is peculiarly suitable. The woman is the ungodly Jewish people, who, as they had hitherto sat in their sins, were now to be surrounded by their punishments. The lump of lead laid upon her symbolizes that the Lord by His judgment would arrest the people in their sinful course. The women indicate the instruments which God will employ for the punishment of His people, hostile nations, as formerly the Babylonians. The future dwelling-place of the

Jews when driven out of their own land, the prophet here designates without farther explanation by the name of the country of their former exile, just as he does (chap. xxxi.) their future oppressors by the name of Asshur and Egypt.—*Hengstenberg.*

THE STAVES OF BEAUTY AND BANDS BROKEN.

"*And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock,*" *etc.*—Zech. xi. 7-17.

The contents of this chapter may be divided into three parts, and the truth taught is that uttered by our Lord in the parable of the wicked husbandmen. The first three verses tell of judgment to come upon Israel under the similitude of a terrible storm which carries all before it, sweeping down even the mighty cedars of Lebanon. The cause of this storm of judgment is that announced, viz., that Israel is doomed to destruction, is "the flock of the slaughter." Then the prophet, personating Jehovah, makes an effort to roll back the visitation. He takes upon himself the office of shepherd, the names of the two staves of office set forth his gentle and wise rule. He tries to rid the flock of the false shepherds, and to win back its allegiance to the true one. But he fails in both efforts, and breaks one staff in token of his failure. Then he claims compensation for his labour in their service, and they offer him the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave. This he casts aside as an insult, breaks his other staff of office, and leaves them to their doom. The third part of the chapter (verses 15-17) contains the command of God to show the nation by means of another symbolic action,—the taking of the instruments of a foolish or false shepherd—that they should indeed be given over to false rulers, seeing they had rejected Him who would have ruled them in righteousness and love.

LESSONS.

I.—Unity from union with God is national beauty. It is the union of the members of the body with the head which gives to the entire frame its dignity and beauty. A headless trunk has no beauty, but when body and limbs are fitly framed together, that symmetry is attained which God intended. The beauty of a tree consists in the union of branches by union with the trunk. The unity of the Hebrew nation was destroyed by their wilful severance of themselves from their Divine Head. Lack of union with God brought discord into the nation and destroyed their national beauty. (See Psa. cxxxiii.)

II.—Men must have a soul-shepherd, and when God is rejected they must have a bad one. If a road is known to one person only, any other man who offers to guide the traveller must be his enemy. If a man is deeply wounded, he must have help from some one outside himself, and the quack who undertakes to heal him, and is ignorant of the proper way to treat him, will be likely to be his murderer. There is but One Being who is acquainted with the soul's needs; if He is rejected, any other must harm the soul. God claims to be the only Saviour. "There is none beside me" (Isa. xlv. 21). Christ warned Israel against false shepherds, yet, as a nation, they chose them and rejected Him, and as He only could really lead and feed them, their choice necessarily issued in their ruin.

III.—Sin disinherits men and nations of their God-given portion. In the great up-heavals of the pre-adamite world the inhabitants of entire forests and rivers were, for reasons known to the Divine Creator, dispossessed of their inheritance of the earth, and we only know that they had an existence by the scanty remains of them which we find in the rocks. So the sons of Adam to whom the Most High in the early ages "divided their inheritance" (Deut. xxxii. 8) have entirely ceased

to exist as nations, and all we know about them now is gathered from the scanty records of them in ancient books or in the ruins of their cities. Of the Hebrew nation, "the Lord's portion, the lot of His inheritance," we know more, but sin has been the cause of their being deprived of their especial portion as well as of the destruction of the Gentile nations. In this parable, and in most of those we have been considering, we have set forth the greatness and the condescension of God on the one hand, and the greatness and the iniquity and folly of man on the other. God stoops to win back sinners by argument, by symbolism, by threatening of certain retribution, and thus shows His estimate of man's worth; while the general refusal of those who were thus addressed to listen to the voice of mercy shows the depths to which they had fallen. The entire teaching of the Old Testament parables may be summed up in the words of Isaiah, "Here, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. . . . Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. i. 2, 18, 19, 20).

SELECTED—I.

The flock is called "the flock of slaughter" because its present masters are slaying it to enrich themselves. Israel was given up into the hands of the nations of the world, to punish it for its sin. But as the nations abused the power entrusted to them, and sought to destroy when they ought only to have chastised, the Lord takes charge of the people as their shepherd. . . . . The names given to the staves are intended to point to the blessings which the flock receives through His pastoral activity. A double kind of salvation is bestowed upon the nation through the care of the Good

Shepherd. The first staff is *Beauty* or *Favour*. (See Psa. xc. 17.) It is in the latter sense that the word is used here, and it shows what Jehovah will bestow upon his people. The name of the second staff sets forth the blessing of fraternal unity which the sheep receive by the favour of God. The shepherds destroyed are those who slaughtered the flock, according to ver. 5, and must be understood as heathen rulers. The description of the shepherd's activity is followed from ver. 8 by a description of the attitude which the flock assumed in relation to the services performed on its behalf. . . . . In consequence of the experience which the shepherd of the Lord has had, he resolves to give up the feeding of the flock and relinquish it to its fate. . . . . The breaking of the first staff intimates that the good received through it will be henceforth withdrawn, but the connection with the flock is not entirely dissolved until after the flock rewards him for his services with base ingratitude (ver. 12). The wages are described ironically as "a splendid value." The breaking of the second staff intimates the breaking up of the nation into parties which manifested itself in a terrible manner after the rejection of Christ, and accelerated its ruin in the Roman war. —*Keil.*

SELECTED—II.

By the names of the two shepherd's staves, I understand two special ends of Christ's pastoral service.

I.—To restore beauty and to erect that collapsed order of doctrine and worship which had been corrupted; for verity of doctrine, purity of worship, and decency of order, are the special beauties of a Church which render it amiable; upon these accounts it is that Sion and the house of God therein are so often called "the beauty of the Lord," and "the beauty of holiness" (Psa. xxvii. 4; xcvi. 6-9, etc.). Christ, in his ministry, did cleanse the doctrine of the Church in His Sermon on the Mount, and the worship of the Church in His purging of the temple, and so filled His house with glory

(Hag. ii. 7), and made beautiful the feet of His ministers (Rom. x. 15). The magnificence of the temple of Solomon, the glorious garments of the priests, etc., were all shadows and types of those spiritual and heavenly beauties, wherewith Christ adorned His Church.

II.—To gather "together into one" His scattered and divided people (John xi. 52), that from Him the whole body may be joined together and compacted (Eph. iv. 16) in peace and love to one another, according to His prayer (John xvii. 21-23). This, I take it, is meant by the staff called "Bands," making of the stick of Judah and Joseph one (Ezek. xxxvii. 19). Upon rejecting Christ, those who had been before the Lord's peculiar people, and were knit together in the bonds of a brotherly covenant, were no longer consociated in the same policy or possession, but devoured by the Roman army, and dissipated into divers and remote nations.

III.—The *feeding* of the flock expresses the tender care and gentle government of the rule of Christ. He came to seek and to save His lost sheep, to rule them by His royal authority, to lead them by His most Holy example; to feed them by His body, word, and Spirit; to heal them and bind them; to fold and defend them; to rescue and deliver them out of the mouth of the wolf and lion.

The whole subject sets forth the duty which the under-shepherds owe to the flock of Christ to whom is entrusted the ministry of reconciliation.—*Bishop Reynolds.*

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